

FATHER CHRISTMAS



AND
OTHER
STORIES

BY JULIANA HORATIA EWING



To Vernon

From Santa

1908.



OLD FATHER CHRISTMAS

AND OTHER TALES

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OLD FATHER CHRISTMAS

AN OLD-FASHIONED TALE OF THE YOUNG DAYS OF
A GRUMPY OLD GODFATHER.

CHAPTER I.

“CAN you fancy, young people,” said Godfather Garbel, winking with his prominent eyes, and moving his feet backwards and forwards in his square shoes, so that you could hear the squeak-leather half a room off—“can you fancy my having been a very little boy, and having a godmother? But I had, and she sent me presents on my birthdays too. And young people did not get presents when I was a child as they get them now. *Grumph!* We had not half so many toys as you have, but we kept them twice as long. I think we were fonder of them too, though they were neither so handsome, nor so expensive as these new-fangled affairs you are always breaking about the house. *Grumph!*”

“You see, middle-class folk were more saving then. My mother turned and dyed her dresses, and when she had done with them, the servant was very glad to have them; but, bless me! your mother’s maids dress so much finer than their mistress, I do not think they would say ‘thank you’ for her best Sunday silk. The bustle’s the wrong shape. *Grumph!*”

“What’s that you are laughing at, little miss? It’s *pannier*, is it? Well, well, bustle or pannier, call it what you like; but only donkeys wore panniers in my young days, and many’s the ride I’ve had in them.

“ Now as I say, my relations and friends thought twice before they pulled out five shillings in a toy shop, but they didn’t forget me, all the same.

“ On my eighth birthday my mother gave me a bright blue comforter of her own knitting.

“ My little sister gave me a ball. My mother had cut out the divisions from various bits in the rag bag, and my sister had done some of the seaming. It was stuffed with bran, and had a cork inside which had broken from old age, and would no longer fit the pickle jar it belonged to. This made the ball bound when we played ‘ prisoner’s base.’

“ My father gave me the broken driving-whip that had lost the lash, and an old pair of his gloves, to play coachman with ; these I had long wished for, since next to sailing in a ship, in my ideas, came the honor and glory of driving a coach.

“ My whole soul, I must tell you, was set upon being a sailor. In those days I had rather put to sea once on Farmer Fodder’s duck-pond than ride twice atop of his hay-wagon ; and between the smell of hay and the softness of it, and the height you are up above other folk, and the danger of tumbling off if you don’t look out—for hay is elastic as well as soft—you don’t easily beat a ride on a hay-wagon for pleasure. But as I say, I’d rather put to sea on the duck-pond, though the best craft I could borrow was the pigstye-door, and a pole to punt with, and the village boys jeering when I got aground, which was most of the time—besides the duck-pond never having a wave on it worth the name, punt as you would, and so shallow you could not have got drowned in it to save your life.

“ You’re laughing now, little master, are you ? But let me tell you that drowning’s the death for a sailor, whatever you may think. So I’ve always maintained, and have given every navigable sea in the known world a chance, though here I am after all, laid up in arm-

chairs and feather-beds, to wait for bronchitis or some other slow poison. *Grumph!*

“Well, we must all go as we’re called, sailors or landsmen, and, as



I was saying, if I was never to sail a ship, I would have liked to drive a coach, serving His Majesty (Her Majesty now God bless her!) carrying the Royal Arms, and bound to go, rough weather and fair. Many's the time I've done it (in play you understand) with that whip and those gloves. Dear! dear! The pains I took to teach my sister Patty to be a highwayman, and jump out on me from the drying ground hedge in the dusk with a 'Stand and deliver!' which she couldn't get

out of her throat for fright, and wouldn't jump hard enough for fear of hurting me.

"The whip and the gloves gave me joy, I can tell you; but there was more to come.

"Kitty the servant gave me a shell that she had had by her for years. How I had coveted that shell! It had this remarkable property: when you put it to your ear you could hear the roaring of the sea. I had never seen the sea, but Kitty was born in a fisherman's cottage, and many an hour have I sat by the kitchen fire whilst she told me strange stories of the mighty ocean, and ever and anon she would snatch the shell from the mantelpiece and clap it to my ear, crying, 'There child, you couldn't hear it plainer than that. It's the very moral!'

"When Kitty gave me that shell for my very own I felt that life had little more to offer. I held it to every ear in the house, including the cat's; and, seeing Dick the sexton's son go by with an armful of straw to stuff Guy Fawkes, I ran out, and in my anxiety to make him share the treat, and learn what the sea is like, I clapped the shell to his ear so smartly and unexpectedly, that he, thinking me to have struck him, knocked me down then and there with his bundle of straw. When he understood the rights of the case, he begged my pardon handsomely, and gave me two whole treacle sticks and part of a third out of his breeches' pocket, in return for which I forgave him freely, and promised to let him hear the sea roar on every Saturday half holiday till farther notice.

"And, speaking of Dick and the straw reminds me that my birthday falls on the fifth of November. From this it came about that I always had to bear a good many jokes about being burnt as a Guy Fawkes; but on the other hand, I was allowed to make a small bonfire of my own, and to have eight potatoes to roast therein, and

eight-pennyworth of crackers to let off in the evening. A potato and a pennyworth of crackers for every year of my life.

“On this eighth birthday, having got all the above-named gifts, I cried, in the fulness of my heart, ‘There never was such a day!’ And yet there was more to come, for the evening coach brought me a parcel, and the parcel was my godmother’s picture-book.

“My godmother was a gentlewoman of small means; but she was accomplished. She could make very spirited sketches, and knew how to color them after they were outlined and shaded in Indian ink. She had a pleasant talent for versifying. She was very industrious. I have it from her own lips that she copied the figures in my picture-book from prints in several different houses at which she visited. They were fancy portraits of characters, most of which were familiar to my mind. There were Guy Fawkes, Punch, his then Majesty the King, Bogy, the Man in the Moon, the Clerk of the Weather Office, a Dunce, and Old Father Christmas. Beneath each sketch was a stanza of my godmother’s own composing.

“My godmother was very ingenious. She had been mainly guided in her choice of these characters by the prints she happened to meet with, as she did not trust herself to design a figure. But if she could not get exactly what she wanted, she had a clever knack of tracing an outline of the attitude from some engraving, and altering the figure to suit her purpose in the finished sketch. She was the soul of truthfulness, and the notes she added to the index of contents in my picture-book spoke at once for her honesty in avowing obligations, and her ingenuity in availing herself of opportunities.

They ran thus :—

No. 1,—GUY FAWKES. Outlined from a figure of a warehouseman rolling a sherry cask into Mr. Rudd’s wine vaults. I added the hat, cloak, and boots in the finished drawing.

No. 2.—PUNCH. I sketched him from the life.

No. 3.—HIS MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY THE KING. On a quart jug bought in Cheapside.

No. 4.—BOGY, *with bad boys in the bag on his back*. Outlined from Christian bending under his burden, in my mother's old copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress." The face from Giant Despair.

No. 5 and No. 6.—THE MAN IN THE MOON, AND THE CLERK OF THE WEATHER OFFICE. From a book of caricatures belonging to Dr. James.

No. 7.—A DUNCE. From a steel engraving framed in rosewood that hangs in my Uncle Wilkinson's parlor.

No. 8.—OLD FATHER CHRISTMAS. From a German book at Lady Littleham's.

CHAPTER II.

My sister Patty was six years old. We loved each other dearly. The picture-book was almost as much hers as mine. We sat so long together on one big footstool by the fire, with our arms round each other, and the book resting on our knees, that Kitty called down blessings on my godmother's head for having sent a volume that kept us both so long out of mischief.

"'If books was allus as useful as that, they'd do for me,' said she; and though this speech did not mean much, it was a great deal for Kitty to say; since, not being herself an educated person, she naturally thought that 'little enough good comes of larning.'

"Patty and I had our favorites amongst the pictures. Bögy, now, was a character one did not care to think about too near bed-time. I was tired of Guy Fawkes, and thought he looked more natural made



of straw, as Dick did him. The Duncce was a little too personal ; but Old Father Christmas took hearts by storm ; we had never seen anything like him, though now-a-days you may get a plaster figure of him in any toy-shop at Christmas-time, with hair and beard like cotton-wool, and a Christmas-tree in his hand.

“ The custom of Christmas-trees came from Germany. I can remember when they were first introduced into England, and what wonderful things we thought them. Now, every village school has its tree, and the scholars openly discuss whether the presents have been ‘ good,’ or ‘ mean,’ as compared with other trees of former years.

“ The first one that I ever saw I believed to have come from good Father Christmas himself ; but little boys have grown too wise now to be taken in for their own amusement. They are not excited by secret and mysterious preparations in the back drawing-room ; they

hardly confess to the thrill—which I feel to this day—when the folding-doors are thrown open, and amid the blaze of tapers, Mamma, like a Fate, advances with her scissors to give every one what falls to his lot.

“Well, young people, when I was eight years old I had not seen a Christmas-tree, and the first picture of one I ever saw was the picture of that held by Old Father Christmas in my godmother’s picture-book.

“‘What are those things on the tree?’ I asked.

“‘Candles,’ said my father.

“‘No, father, not the candles; the other things?’

“‘Those are toys, my son.’

“‘Are they ever taken off?’

“‘Yes, they are taken off, and given to the children who stand round the tree.’

“Patty and I grasped each other by the hand, and with one voice murmured, ‘How kind of Old Father Christmas!’

“By-and-by I asked, ‘How old is Father Christmas?’

“My father laughed, and said, ‘One thousand eight hundred and thirty years, child,’ which was then the year of our Lord, and thus one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the first great Christmas Day.

“‘He *looks* very old,’ whispered Patty.

“And I, who was, for my age, what Kitty called ‘Bible-learned,’ said thoughtfully, and with some puzzledness of mind, ‘Then he’s older than Methuselah.’

“But my father had left the room, and did not hear my difficulty.

“November and December went by, and still the picture-book kept all its charm for Patty and me; and we pondered on and loved Old Father Christmas as children can love and realize a fancy friend. To those who remember the fancies of their childhood I need say no more.

"Christmas week came, Christmas Eve came. My father and mother were mysteriously and unaccountably busy in the parlor (we had only one parlor), and Patty and I were not allowed to go in. We went into the kitchen, but even here was no place of rest for us. Kitty was 'all over the place,' as she phrased it, and cakes, mince-pies, and puddings were with her. As she justly observed, 'There was no place there for children and books to sit with their toes in the fire, when a body wanted to be at the oven all along. The cat was enough for *her* temper,' she added.

"As to puss, who obstinately refused to take a hint which drove her out into the Christmas frost, she returned again and again with soft steps, and a stupidity that was, I think, affected, to the warm hearth, only to fly at intervals, like a football, before Kitty's hasty slipper.

"We had more sense, or less courage. We bowed to Kitty's behests, and went to the back door.

"Patty and I were hardy children, and accustomed to 'run out' in all weathers, without much extra wrapping up. We put Kitty's shawl over our two heads, and went outside. I rather hoped to see something of Dick, for it was holiday time; but no Dick passed. He was busy helping his father to bore holes in the carved seats of the church, which were to hold sprigs of holly for the morrow—that was the idea of church decoration in my young days. You have improved on your elders there, young people, and I am candid enough to allow it. Still, the sprigs of red and green were better than nothing, and, like your lovely wreaths and pious devices, they made one feel as if the old black wood were bursting into life and leaf again for very Christmas joy!

"And, if one only knelt carefully, they did not scratch his nose," added Godfather Garbel, chuckling and rubbing his own, which was large and rather red.

“ Well,” he continued, “ Dick was busy, and not to be seen. We ran across the little yard and looked over the wall at the end to see if we could see anything or anybody. From this point there was a pleasant meadow field sloping prettily away to a little hill about three-quarters of a mile distant ; which, catching some fine breezes from the moors beyond, was held to be a place of cure for whooping-cough, or ‘ kinkcough,’ as it was vulgarly called. Up to the top of this Kitty had dragged me, and carried Patty, when we were recovering from the complaint, as I well remember. It was the only ‘ chance of air ’ we could afford, and I dare say it did as well as if we had gone into badly-drained lodgings at the seaside.

“ This hill was now covered with snow, and stood off against the gray sky. The white fields looked vast and dreary in the dusk. The only gay things to be seen were the red berries on the holly hedge, in the little lane—which, running by the end of our back-yard, led up to the Hall—and a fat robin redbreast who was staring at me. I was watching the robin, when Patty, who had been peering out of her corner of Kitty’s shawl, gave a great jump that dragged the shawl from our heads and cried,

“ ‘ Look ! ’

CHAPTER III.

I LOOKED. An old man was coming along the lane. His hair and beard were as white as cotton-wool. He had a face like the sort of apple that keeps well in winter ; his coat was old and brown. There was snow about him in patches, and he carried a small fir-tree.

“ The same conviction seized upon us both. With one breath we exclaimed, ‘ *It’s Old Father Christmas !* ’

“ I know now that it was only an old man of the place, with whom

we did not happen to be acquainted, and that he was taking a little fir-tree up to the Hall, to be made into a Christmas-tree. He was a very good-humored old fellow, and rather deaf, for which he made up by smiling and nodding his head a good deal, and saying, 'Aye, aye, to be sure !' at likely intervals.

"As he passed us and met our earnest gaze, he smiled and nodded so affably, that I was bold enough to cry, 'Good-evening, Father Christmas !'

" 'Same to you !' said he, in a high-pitched voice.

" 'Then you *are* Father Christmas,' said Patty.

" 'And a Happy New Year,' was Father Christmas's reply, which rather put me out. But he smiled in such a satisfactory manner, that Patty went on, 'You're very old, aren't you ?'

" 'So I be, miss, so I be,' said Father Christmas, nodding.

" 'Father says you're eighteen hundred and thirty years old,' I muttered.

" 'Aye, aye, to be sure,' said Father Christmas, 'I'm a long age.'

" A *very* long age, thought I, and I added, 'You're nearly twice as old as Methuselah, you know,' thinking that this might not have struck him.

" 'Aye, aye,' said Father Christmas ; but he did not seem to think anything of it. After a pause he held up a tree, and cried, 'D'ye know what this is, little miss ?'

" 'A Christmas-tree,' said Patty.

" And the old man smiled and nodded.

" I leant over the wall, and shouted, 'But there are no candles.'

" 'By-and-by,' said Father Christmas, nodding as before. 'When it's dark they'll all be lighted up. That'll be a fine sight !'

" 'Toys too, there'll be, won't there ?' screamed Patty.

" Father Christmas nodded his head. 'And sweeties,' he added, expressively.

"I could feel Patty trembling, and my own heart beat fast. The thought which agitated us both, was this—'Was Father Christmas bringing the tree to us?' But very anxiety, and some modesty also, kept us from asking outright.

"Only when the old man shouldered his tree, and prepared to move on, I cried in despair, 'Oh, are you going?'

"'I'm coming back by-and-by,' said he.

"'How soon?' cried Patty.

"'About four o'clock,' said the old man, smiling, 'I'm only going up yonder.'

"And, nodding and smiling as he went, he passed away down the lane.

"'Up yonder.' This puzzled us. Father Christmas had pointed, but so indefinitely, that he might have been pointing to the sky, or the fields, or the little wood at the end of the Squire's grounds. I thought the latter, and suggested to Patty that perhaps he had some place underground, like Aladdin's cave, where he got the candles, and all the pretty things for the tree. This idea pleased us both, and we amused ourselves by wondering what Old Father Christmas would choose for us from his stores in that wonderful hole where he dressed his Christmas-trees.

"'I wonder, Patty,' said I, 'why there's no picture of Father Christmas's dog in the book.' For at the old man's heels in the lane there crept a little brown and white spaniel, looking very dirty in the snow.

"'Perhaps it's a new dog that he's got to take care of his cave,' said Patty.

"When we went indoors we examined the picture afresh by the dim light from the passage window, but there was no dog there.

"My father passed us at this moment, and patted my head.



'Father,' said I, 'I don't know, but I do think Old Father Christmas is going to bring us a Christmas-tree to-night.'

" 'Who's been telling you that?' said my father. But he passed on before I could explain that we had seen Father Christmas himself, and had had his word for it that he would return at four o'clock, and that the candles on his tree would be lighted as soon as it was dark.

" We hovered on the outskirts of the rooms till four o'clock came. We sat on the stairs and watched the big clock, which I was just learning to read : and Patty made herself giddy with constantly looking up and counting the four strokes, towards which the hour hand slowly moved. We put our noses into the kitchen now and then, to smell the cakes and get warm, and anon we hung about the parlor door, and were most unjustly accused of trying to peep. What did we care what our mother was doing in the parlor?—we who had seen Old Father Christmas himself, and were expecting him back again every moment!

" At last the church clock struck. The sounds boomed heavily through the frost, and Patty thought there were four of them. Then, after due choking and whirring, our own clock struck, and we counted the strokes quite clearly—one! two! three! four! Then we got Kitty's shawl once more, and stole out into the back-yard. We ran to our old place and peeped, but could see nothing.

" 'We'd better get up on to the wall,' I said ; and with some difficulty and distress from rubbing her bare knees against the cold stones, and getting the snow up her sleeves, Patty got on the coping of the little wall. I was just struggling after her, when something warm and something cold coming suddenly against the bare calves of my legs, made me shriek with fright. I came down 'with a run,' and bruised my knees, my elbows, and my chin ; and the snow that hadn't gone up Patty's sleeves, went down my neck. Then I found that the

cold thing was a dog's nose, and the warm thing was his tongue ; and Patty cried from her post of observation, ' It's Father Christmas's dog, and he's licking your legs.'

" It really was the dirty little brown and white spaniel ; and he persisted in licking me, and jumping on me, and making curious little noises, that must have meant something if one had known his language. I was rather harassed at the moment. My legs were sore, I was a little afraid of the dog, and Patty was very much afraid of sitting on the wall without me.

" ' You won't fall,' I said to her. ' Get down, will you ? ' I said to the dog.

" ' Humpty Dumpty fell off a wall,' said Patty.

" ' Bow ! wow ! ' said the dog.

" I pulled Patty down, and the dog tried to pull me down ; but when my little sister was on her feet, to my relief, he transferred his attentions to her. When he had jumped at her, and licked her several times, he turned round and ran away.

" ' He's gone,' said I ;
' I'm so glad.'

" But even as I spoke he was back again, crouching at Patty's feet, and glaring at her with eyes the color of his ears.

" Now Patty was very fond of animals, and when the dog looked at her she looked at the dog, and then she said to me, ' He wants us to go with him.'

" On which (as if he understood our language, though we were ignorant of his) the spaniel sprang away, and went off as hard as he



could ; and Patty and I went after him, a dim hope crossing my mind—‘ Perhaps Father Christmas has sent him for us.’

“ This idea was rather favored by the fact that the dog led us up the lane. Only a little way ; then he stopped by something lying in the ditch—and once more we cried in the same breath, ‘ It’s Old Father Christmas ! ’

CHAPTER IV.

RETURNING from the Hall, the old man had slipped upon a bit of ice, and lay stunned in the snow.

“ Patty began to cry. ‘ I think he’s dead,’ she sobbed.

“ ‘ He is very old, I don’t wonder,’ I murmured ; ‘ but perhaps he’s not. I’ll fetch Father.’

“ My father and Kitty were soon on the spot. Kitty was as strong as a man ; and they carried Father Christmas between them into the kitchen. There he quickly revived.

“ I must do Kitty the justice to say that she did not utter a word of complaint at this disturbance of her labors ; and that she drew the old man’s chair close up to the oven with her own hand. She was so much affected by the behavior of his dog, that she admitted him even to the hearth ; on which puss, being acute enough to see how matters stood, lay down with her back so close to the spaniel’s that Kitty could not expel one without kicking both.

“ For our parts, we felt sadly anxious about the tree ; otherwise we could have wished for no better treat than to sit at Kitty’s round table taking tea with Father Christmas. Our usual fare of thick bread and treacle was to-night exchanged for a delicious variety of cakes, which were none the worse to us for being ‘ tasters and wasters ’

—that is, little bits of dough, or shortbread, put in to try the state of the oven, and certain cakes that had got broken or burnt in the baking.

“ Well, there we sat, helping Old Father Christmas to tea and cake, and wondering in our hearts what could have become of the tree. But



you see, young people, when I was a child, parents were stricter than they are now. Even before Kitty died, (and she has been dead many a long year) there was a change, and she said that ‘children got to think anything became them.’ I think we were taught more honest shame about certain things than I often see in

little boys and girls now. We were ashamed of boasting, or being greedy, or selfish ; we were ashamed of asking for anything that was not offered to us, and of interrupting grown-up people, or talking about ourselves. Why, papas and mammas now-a-days seem quite proud to let their friends see how bold and greedy and talkative their children can be ! A lady said to me the other day, ‘ You wouldn’t believe, Mr. Garbel, how forward dear little Harry is for his age. He has his word in everything, and is not a bit shy ! and his papa never comes home from town but Harry runs to ask if he’s brought him a present. Papa says he’ll be the ruin of him ! ’

“ ‘ Madam,’ said I, ‘ even without your word for it, I am quite aware that your child is forward. He is forward and greedy and intrusive, as you justly point out, and I wish you joy of him when those qualities are fully developed. I think his father’s fears are well founded.’

"But, bless me ! now-a-days, it's 'Come and tell Mr. Smith what a fine boy you are, and how many houses you can build with your bricks,' or 'The dear child wants everything he sees,' or 'Little pet never lets Mamma alone for a minute ; does she love, love ?' But in my young days it was, 'Self praise is no recommendation' (as Kitty used to tell me), or, 'You're knocking too hard at No. One' (as my father said when we talked about ourselves), or, 'Little boys should be seen and not heard' (as a rule of conduct 'in company'), or, 'Don't ask for what you want, but take what's given you and be thankful.'

"And so you see, young people, Patty and I felt a delicacy in asking Old Father Christmas about the tree. It was not till we had had tea three times round, with tasters and wasters to match, that Patty said very gently, 'It's quite dark now.' And then she heaved a deep sigh.

"Burning anxiety overcame me. I leant towards Father Christmas, and shouted—I had found out that it was needful to shout,—

" 'I suppose the candles are on the tree now ?' "

" 'Just about putting of 'em on,' said Father Christmas.

" 'And the presents, too ?' said Patty.

" 'Aye, aye, *to* be sure,' said Father Christmas, and he smiled delightfully.

"I was thinking what farther questions I might venture upon when he pushed his cup towards Patty, saying, 'Since you are so pressing, miss, I'll take another dish.'

"And Kitty, swooping on us from the oven, cried, 'Make yourself at home, sir ; there's more where these come from: Make a long arm, Miss Patty, and hand them cakes.'

"So we had to devote ourselves to the duties of the table ; and Patty, holding the lid with one hand and pouring with the other, supplied Father Christmas's wants with a heavy heart.

“At last he was satisfied. I said grace, during which he stood, and indeed he stood for some time afterwards with his eyes shut—I fancy under the impression that I was still speaking. He had said a fervent ‘Amen,’ and reseated himself, when my father put his head into the kitchen, and made this remarkable statement,—

“‘Old Father Christmas has sent a tree to the young people.’

“Patty and I uttered a cry of delight, and we forthwith danced round the old man, saying, ‘Oh, how nice! Oh, how kind of you!’ which I think must have bewildered him, but he only smiled and nodded.

“‘Come along,’ said my father. ‘Come children. Come Reuben. Come Kitty.’

“And he went into the parlor, and we all followed him.

“My godmother’s picture of a Christmas-tree was very pretty; and the flames of the candles were so naturally done in red and yellow, that I always wondered that they did not shine at night. But the picture was nothing to the reality. We had been sitting almost in the dark, for, as Kitty said, ‘Firelight was quite enough to burn at meal-times.’ And when the parlor door was thrown open, and the tree, with lighted tapers on all the branches, burst upon our view, the blaze was dazzling, and threw such a glory round the little gifts, and the bags of colored muslin with acid drops, and pink rose drops, and comfits inside, as I shall never forget. We all got something; and Patty and I, at any rate, believed that the things came from the stores of Old Father Christmas. We were not undeceived even by his gratefully accepting a bundle of old clothes which had been hastily put together to form his present.

“We were all very happy; even Kitty, I think, though she kept her sleeves rolled up, and seemed rather to grudge enjoying herself (a weak point in some energetic characters.) She went back to her oven before the lights were out, and the angel on the top of the

tree taken down. She locked up her present (a little work-box) at once. She often showed it off afterwards, but it was kept in the same bit of tissue paper till she died. Our presents certainly did not last so long !

“The old man died about a week afterwards, so we never made his acquaintance as a common personage. When he was buried, his little dog came to us. I suppose he remembered the hospitality he had received. Patty adopted him, and he was very faithful. Puss always looked on him with favor. I hoped during our rambles together in the following summer that he would lead us at last to the cave where Christmas-trees are dressed. But he never did.

“Our parents often spoke of his late master as ‘old Reuben,’ but children are not easily disabused of a favorite fancy, and in Patty’s thoughts and in mine the old man was long gratefully remembered as OLD FATHER CHRISTMAS.”

SNAP-DRAGONS

A TALE OF CHRISTMAS EVE.

MR. AND MRS. SKRATDJ.



ONCE upon a time there lived a certain family of the name of Skratdj. (It has a Russian or Polish look, and yet they most certainly lived in England.) They were remarkable for the following peculiarity. They seldom seriously quarrelled, but they never agreed about anything. It is hard to say whether it were more painful for their friends to hear them constantly

contradicting each other, or gratifying to discover that it "meant nothing," and was "only their way."

It began with the father and mother. They were a worthy couple, and really attached to each other. But they had a habit of contradicting each other's statements, and opposing each others opinions, which, though mutually understood and allowed for in private, was

most trying to the by-standers in public. If one related an anecdote, the other would break in with half-a-dozen corrections of trivial details of no interest or importance to anyone, the speakers included. For instance : Suppose the two dining in a strange house, and Mrs. Skratdj seated by the host, and contributing to the small-talk of the dinner-table. Thus :—

“Oh yes. Very changeable weather indeed. It looked quite promising yesterday morning in the town, but it began to rain at noon.”

“A quarter past eleven, my dear,” Mr. Skratdj’s voice would be heard to say from several chairs down, in the corrective tones of a husband and a father ; “and really, my dear, so far from being a promising morning, I must say it looked about as threatening as it well could. Your memory is not always accurate in small matters, my love.”

But Mrs. Skratdj had not been a wife and a mother for fifteen years, to be snuffed out at one snap of the marital snuffers. As Mr. Skratdj leaned forward in his chair, she leaned forward in hers, and defended herself across the intervening couples.

“Why, my dear Mr. Skratdj, you said yourself the weather had not been so promising for a week.”

“What I said, my dear, pardon me, was that the barometer was higher than it had been for a week. But, as you might have observed if these details were in your line, my love, which they are not, the rise was extraordinarily rapid, and there is no surer sign of unsettled weather.—But Mrs. Skratdj is apt to forget these unimportant trifles,” he added, with a comprehensive smile round the dinner-table ; “her thoughts are very probably absorbed by the more important domestic questions of the nursery.”

“Now I think that’s rather unfair on Mr. Skratdj’s part,” Mrs. Skratdj would chirp, with a smile quite as affable and as general as

her husband's. "I'm sure he's *quite* as forgetful and inaccurate as I am. And I don't think *my* memory is at *all* a bad one."

"You forgot the dinner hour when we were going out to dine last week, nevertheless," said Mr. Skratdj.

"And you couldn't help me when I asked you," was the sprightly retort. "And I'm sure it's not like you to forget anything about *dinner*, my dear."

"The letter was addressed to you," said Mr. Skratdj.

"I sent it to you by Jemima," said Mrs. Skratdj.

"I didn't read it," said Mr. Skratdj.

"Well, you burnt it," said Mrs. Skratdj; "and, as I always say, there's nothing more foolish than burning a letter of invitation before the day, for one is certain to forget."

"I've no doubt you always do say it," Mr. Skratdj remarked, with a smile, "but I certainly never remember to have heard the observation from your lips, my love."

"Whose memory's in fault there?" asked Mrs. Skratdj triumphantly; and as at this point the ladies rose, Mrs. Skratdj had the last word.

Indeed, as may be gathered from this conversation, Mrs. Skratdj was quite able to defend herself. When she was yet a bride, and young and timid, she used to collapse when Mr. Skratdj contradicted her statements, and set her stories straight in public. Then she hardly ever opened her lips without disappearing under the domestic extinguisher. But in the course of fifteen years she had learned that Mr. Skratdj's bark was a great deal worse than his bite. (If, indeed, he had a bite at all.) Thus snubs that made other people's ears tingle, had no effect whatever on the lady to whom they were addressed, for she knew exactly what they were worth, and had by this time become fairly adept at snapping in return. In the days when she succumbed she was occasionally unhappy, but now she and her husband

understood each other, and having agreed to differ, they unfortunately agreed also to differ in public.

Indeed, it was the by-standers who had the worst of it on these occasions. To the worthy couple themselves the habit had become second nature, and in no way affected the friendly tenor of their domestic relations. They would interfere with each other's conversation, contradicting assertions, and disputing conclusions for a whole evening; and then, when all the world and his wife thought that these ceaseless sparks of bickering must blaze up into a flaming quarrel as soon as they were alone, they would bowl amicably home in a cab, criticizing the friends who were commenting upon them, and as little agreed about the events of the evening as about the details of any other events whatever.

Yes. The by-standers certainly had the worst of it. Those who were at a distance did not mind so much. A domestic squabble at a certain distance is interesting, like an engagement viewed from a point beyond the range of guns. In such a position one may some day be placed oneself! Moreover, it gives a touch of excitement to a dull evening to be able to say *sotto voce* to one's neighbor, "Do listen! The Skratdjs are at it again!" Their unmarried friends thought a terrible abyss of tyranny and aggravation must lie beneath it all, and blessed their stars that they were still single, and able to tell a tale their own way. The married ones had more idea of how it really was, and wished in the name of common sense and good taste that Skratdj and his wife would not make fools of themselves.

So it went on, however; and so, I suppose, it goes on still, for not many bad habits are cured in middle age.

On certain questions of comparative speaking their views were never identical. Such as the temperature being hot or cold, things being light or dark, the apple-tarts being sweet or sour. So one day

Mr. Skratdj came into the room, rubbing his hands, and planting himself at the fire with "Bitterly cold it is to-day, to be sure."

"Why, my dear William," said Mrs Skratdj, "I'm sure you must have got a cold ; I feel a fire quite oppressive myself."

"You were wishing you'd a seal-skin jacket yesterday, when it wasn't half as cold as it is to-day," said Skratdj.

"My dear William ! Why, the children were shivering the whole day, and the wind was in the north."

"Due east, Mrs. Skratdj."

"I know by the smoke," said Mrs. Skratdj, softly but decidedly.

"I fancy I can tell an east wind when I feel it," said Mr. Skratdj, jocosely, to the company.

"I told Jemima to look at the weather-cock," murmured Mrs. Skratdj.

"I don't care a fig for Jemima," said her husband.

On another occasion Mrs. Skratdj and a lady friend were conversing. . . . "We met him at the Smiths'—a gentlemanlike agreeable man, about forty," said Mrs. Skratdj, in reference to some matter interesting to both ladies.

"Not a day over thirty-five," said Mr. Skratdj, from behind his newspaper.

"Why, my dear William, his hair's gray," said Mrs. Skratdj.

"Plenty of men are gray at thirty," said Mr Skratdj. "I knew a man who was gray at twenty-five."

"Well, forty or thirty-five, it doesn't much matter," said Mrs. Skratdj, about to resume her narration.

"Five years matter a good deal to most people at thirty-five," said Mr. Skratdj, as he walked towards the door. "They would make a remarkable difference to me, I know;" and with a jocular air Mr. Skratdj departed, and Mrs. Skratdj had the rest of the anecdote her own way.

THE LITTLE SKRATDJS.



THE Spirit of Contradiction finds a place in most nurseries, though to a varying degree in different ones. Children snap and snarl by nature, like young puppies ; and most of us can remember taking part in some such spirited dialogues as the following :—

{ “ I will.”
 { “ You can’t.”

{ “ You shall.”
 { “ I won’t.”

{ “ You daren’t.”
 { “ I dare.”

{ “ I’ll tell Mamma.”
 { “ I don’t care if you do.”

It is the part of wise parents to repress these squibs and crackers of juvenile contention, and to enforce that slowly-learned lesson, that in this world one must often “ pass over ” and “ put up with ” things in other people, being oneself by no means perfect. Also that it is a kindness, and almost a duty, to let people think and say and do things in their own way occasionally.

But even if Mr. and Mrs. Skratdj had ever thought of teaching all this to their children, it must be confessed that the lesson would not have come with a good grace from either of them, since they snapped and snarled between themselves as much or more than their children in the nursery.

The two eldest were the leaders in the nursery squabbles. Between these, a boy and a girl, a ceaseless war of words was waged from morning to night. And as neither of them lacked ready wit, and both were in constant practise, the art of snapping was cultivated by them to the highest pitch.

It began at breakfast, if not sooner.

"You've taken my chair."

"It's not your chair."

"You know it's the one I like, and it was in my place."

"How do you know it was in your place?"

"Never mind. I do know."

"No, you don't."

"Yes, I do."

"Suppose I say it was in my place."

"You can't, for it wasn't."

"I can, if I like."

"Well, was it?"

"I shan't tell you."

"Ah! that shows it wasn't."

"No, it doesn't."

"Yes, it does."

Etc., etc., etc.

The direction of their daily walks was a fruitful subject of difference of opinion.

"Let's go on the Common to-day, Nurse."

"Oh, don't let's go there; we're always going on the Common."

"I'm sure we're not. We've not been there for ever so long."

"Oh, what a story! We were there on Wednesday. Let's go down Gipse Lane. We never go down Gipse Lane."

"Why, we're always going down Gipse Lane. And there's nothing to see there."

"I don't care. I won't go on the Common, and I shall go and get Papa to say we're to go down Gipsev Lane. I can run faster than you."

"That's very sneaking; but I don't care."

"Papa! Papa! Polly's called me a sneak."

"No, I didn't, Papa."

"You did."

"No, I didn't. I only said it was sneaking of you to say you'd run faster than me, and get Papa to say we were to go down Gipsev Lane."

"Then you did call him sneaking," said Mr. Skratdj. "And you're a very naughty ill-mannered little girl. You're getting very troublesome, Polly, and I shall have to send you to school, where you'll be kept in order. Go where your brother wishes at once."

For Polly and her brother had reached an age when it was convenient, if possible, to throw the blame of all nursery differences on Polly. In families where domestic discipline is rather fractious than firm, there comes a stage when the girls almost invariably go to the wall, because they will stand snubbing, and the boys will not. Domestic authority, like some other powers, is apt to be magnified on the weaker class.

But Mr. Skratdj would not always listen even to Harry.

"If you don't give it me back directly, I'll tell about your eating the two magnum-bonums in the kitchen garden on Sunday," said Master Harry on one occasion.

"Tell-tale tit!

Your tongue shall be slit,

And every dog in the town shall have a little bit,"

quoted his sister.

"Ah! You've called me a tell-tale. Now I'll go and tell Papa. You got into a fine scrape for calling me names the other day."

"Go, then! I don't care."

"You wouldn't like me to go, I know."

"You daren't. That's what it is."

"I dare."

"Then why don't you?"

"Oh, I am going; but you'll see what will be the end of it."

Polly, however, had her own reasons for remaining stolid, and Harry started. But when he reached the landing he paused. Mr. Skratdj had especially announced that morning that he did not wish to be disturbed, and though he was a favorite, Harry had no desire to invade the dining-room at this crisis. So he returned to the nursery, and said with magnanimous air, "I don't want to get you into a scrape, Polly. If you'll beg my pardon I won't go."

"I'm sure I sha'n't," said Polly, who was equally well informed as to the position of affairs at head-quarters. "Go, if you dare."

"I won't if you want me not," said Harry, discreetly waiving the question of apologies.

"But I'd rather you went," said the obdurate Polly. "You're always telling tales. Go and tell now, if you're not afraid."

So Harry went. But at the bottom of the stairs he lingered again, and was meditating how to return with most credit to his dignity, when Polly's face appeared through the banisters, and Polly's sharp tongue goaded him on.

"Ah! I see you. You're stopping. You daren't go."

"I dare," said Harry; and at last he went.

As he turned the handle of the door, Mr. Skratdj turned round.

"Please, Papa—" Harry began.

"Get away with you!" cried Mr. Skratdj. "Didn't I tell you I was not to be disturbed this morning? What an extraor——"

But Harry had shut the door, and withdrawn precipitately.

Once outside, he returned to the nursery with dignified steps, and an air of apparent satisfaction, saying,

"You're to give me the bricks, please."

"Who says so?"

"Why, who should say so? Where have I been, pray?"

"I don't know, and I don't care."

"I've been to Papa. There!"

"Did he say I was to give up the bricks?"

"I've told you."

"No, you've not."

"I sha'n't tell you any more."

"Then I'll go to Papa and ask."

"Go by all means."

"I won't if you'll tell me truly."

"I sha'n't tell you anything. Go and ask, if you dare," said Harry, only too glad to have the tables turned.

Polly's expedition met with the same fate, and she attempted to cover her retreat in a similar manner.

"Ah! you didn't tell."

"I don't believe you asked Papa."

"Don't you? Very well!"

"Well, did you?"

"Never mind."

Etc., etc., etc.

Meanwhile Mr. Skratdj scolded Mrs. Skratdj for not keeping the children in better order. And Mrs. Skratdj said it was quite impossible to do so, when Mr. Skratdj spoilt Harry as he did, and weakened her (Mrs. Skratdj's) authority by constant interference.

Difference of sex gave point to many of these nursery squabbles, as it so often does to domestic broils.

"Boys never will do what they're asked," Polly would complain.

"Girls ask such unreasonable things," was Harry's retort.

"Not half so unreasonable as the things you ask."

"Ah! that's a different thing! Women have got to do what men tell them, whether it's reasonable or not."

"No, they've not!" said Polly. "At least, that's only husbands and wives."

"All women are inferior animals," said Harry.

"Try ordering Mamma to do what you want, and see!" said Polly.

"Men have got to give orders, and women have to obey," said Harry, falling back on the general principle. "And when I get a wife, I'll take care I make her do what I tell her. But you'll have to obey your husband when you get one."

"I won't have a husband, and then I can do as I like."

"Oh, won't you? You'll try to get one, I know. Girls always want to be married."

"I'm sure I don't know why," said Polly; "they must have had enough of men if they have brothers."

And so they went on, *ad infinitum*, with ceaseless arguments that proved nothing and convinced nobody, and a continual stream of contradiction that just fell short of downright quarreling.

Indeed, there was a kind of snapping even less near to a dispute than in the cases just mentioned. The little Skratdjs, like some other children, were under the unfortunate delusion that it sounds clever to hear little boys and girls snap each other up with smart sayings, and old and rather vulgar play upon words, such as:

"I'll give you a Christmas box. Which ear will you have it on?"

"I won't stand it."

"Pray take a chair."

"You shall have it to-morrow."

"To-morrow never comes."

And so if a visitor kindly began to talk to one of the children, another was sure to draw near and "take up" all the first child's

answers, with smart comments, and catches that sounded as silly as they were tiresome and impertinent.

And ill-mannered as this was, Mr. and Mrs. Skratdj never put a stop to it. Indeed, it was only a caricature of what they did themselves. But they often said, "We can't think how it is the children are always squabbling!"

THE SKRATDJ'S DOG AND THE HOT-TEMPERED GENTLEMAN.

It is wonderful how the state of mind of a whole household is influenced by the heads of it. Mr. Skratdj was a very kind master, and Mrs. Skratdj was a very kind mistress, and yet their servants lived in a perpetual fever of irritability that just fell short of discontent. They jostled each other on the back stairs, said sharp things in the pantry, and kept up a perennial warfare on the subject of the duty of the sexes with the general man-servant. They gave warning on the slightest provocation.

The very dog was infected by the snapping mania. He was not a brave dog, he was not a vicious dog, and no high-breeding sanctioned his pretensions to arrogance. But like his owners, he had contracted a bad habit, a trick, which made him pest of all timid visitors, and indeed of all visitors whatsoever.

The moment anyone approached the house, on certain occasions when he was spoken to, and often in no traceable connection with any cause at all, Snap the mongrel would rush out, and bark in his little sharp voice—"Yap! yap! yap!" If the visitor made a stand, he would bound away sideways on his four little legs; but the moment the visitor was on his way again, Snap was at his heels—"Yap! yap! yap!" He barked at the milkman, the butcher's boy, and the baker, though he saw them every day. He never got used to

the washerwoman, and she never got used to him. She said he "put her in mind of that there black dog in the Pilgrim's Progress." He sat at the gate in summer, and yapped at every vehicle and every pedestrian who ventured to pass on the high road. He never but once had the chance of barking at burglars; and then, though he barked long and loud, nobody got up, for they said, "It's only



Snap's way." The Skratdjs lost a silver teapot, a Stilton cheese, and two electro christening mugs, on this occasion; and Mr. and Mrs. Skratdj dispute who it was who discouraged reliance on Snap's warning to the present day.

One Christmas time, a certain hot-tempered gentleman came to visit the Skratdjs. A tall, sandy, energetic young man, who carried his own bag from the railway. The bag had been crammed rather than packed, after the wont of bachelors; and you could see where the heel of a boot distended the leather, and where the bottle of shaving-cream lay.

As he came up to the house, out came Snap as usual—"Yap! yap!"

yap ! ” Now the gentleman was very fond of dogs, and had borne this greeting some dozen of times from Snap, who for his part knew the visitor quite as well as the washerwoman, and rather better than the butcher’s boy. The gentleman had good, sensible, well-behaved dogs of his own, and was greatly disgusted with Snap’s conduct.

Nevertheless he spoke friendly to him ; and Snap, who had had many a bit from his plate, could not help stopping for a minute to lick his hand. But no sooner did the gentleman proceed on his way, than Snap flew at his heels in the usual fashion—

“Yap ! Yap ! Yap ! ”

On which the gentleman—being hot-tempered, and one of those people with whom it is (as they say) a word and a blow, and the blow first—made a dash at Snap, and Snap taking to his heels, the gentleman flung his carpet-bag after him. The bottle of shaving-cream hit upon a stone and was smashed. The heel of the boot caught Snap on the back, and sent him squealing to the kitchen. And he never barked at that gentleman again.

If the gentleman disapproved of Snap’s conduct, he still less liked the continual snapping of the Skratdj family themselves. He was an old friend of Mr. and Mrs. Skratdj, however, and knew that they were really happy together, and that it was only a bad habit which made them constantly contradict each other. It was in allusion to their real affection for each other, and their perpetual disputing, that he called them the “Snapping Turtles.”

When the war of words waxed hottest at the dinner-table between his host and hostess, he would drive his hands through his shock of sandy hair, and say, with a comical glance out of his umber eyes, “Don’t flirt, my friends. It makes a bachelor feel awkward.”

And neither Mr. or Mrs. Skratdj could help laughing.

With the little Skratdjs his measures were more vigorous. He was very fond of children, and a good friend to them. He grudged



no time or trouble to help them in their games and projects, but he would not tolerate their snapping up each other's words in his presence. He was much more truly kind than many visitors, who think it polite to smile at the sauciness and forwardness which ignorant vanity leads children so often to "show off" before strangers.

These civil acquaintances only abuse both children and parents behind their backs, for the very bad habits which they help to encourage.

The hot-tempered gentleman's treatment of his young friends was very different. One day he was talking to Polly, and making some kind inquiries about her lessons, to which she was replying in a quiet and sensible fashion, when up came Master Harry, and began to display his wit by comment on the conversation, and by snapping at and contradicting his sister's remarks, to which she retorted ; and the usual snap-dialogue went on as usual.

"Then you like music," said the hot-tempered gentleman.

"Yes, I like it very much," said Polly.

"Oh, do you?" Harry broke in. "Then what are you always crying over it for?"

"I'm not always crying over it."

"Yes, you are."

"No, I'm not. I only cry sometimes, when I stick fast."

"Your music must be very sticky, for you're always stuck fast."

"Hold your tongue!" said the hot-tempered gentleman.

With what he imagined to be a very waggish air, Harry put out his tongue, and held it with his finger and thumb. It was unfortunate that he had not time to draw it in again before the hot-tempered gentleman gave him a stinging box on the ear, which brought his teeth rather sharply together on the tip of his tongue, which was bitten in consequence.

"It's no use *speaking*," said the hot-tempered gentleman, driving his hands through his hair.

Children are like dogs, they are very good judges of their real friends. Harry did not like the hot-tempered gentleman a bit the less because he was obliged to respect and obey him ; and all the children

welcomed him boisterously when he arrived that Christmas which we have spoken of in connection with his attack on Snap.

It was on the morning of Christmas Eve that the china punch bowl was broken. Mr. Skratdj had a warm dispute with Mrs. Skratdj as to whether it had been kept in a safe place ; after which both had a brisk encounter with the housemaid, who did not know how it happened ; and she, flouncing down the back passage, kicked Snap ; who forthwith flew at the gardener as he was bringing in the horse-radish for the beef ; who stepping backwards trode upon the cat ; who spit and swore, and went up the pump with her tail as big as a fox's brush.

To avoid this domestic scene, the hot-tempered gentleman withdrew to the breakfast-room and took up a newspaper. By-and-by, Harry and Polly came in, and they were soon snapping comfortably over their own affairs in a corner.

The hot-tempered gentleman's umber eyes had been looking over the top of his newspaper at them for some time, before he called, "Harry, my boy !"

And Harry came up to him.

"Show me your tongue, Harry," said he.

"What for ?" said Harry ; "you're not a doctor."

"Do as I tell you," said the hot-tempered gentleman ; and as Harry saw his hand moving, he put his tongue out with all possible haste. The hot-tempered gentleman sighed. "Ah !" he said in depressed tones ; "I thought so ! —Polly, come and let me look at yours."

Polly, who had crept up during this process, now put out hers. But the hot-tempered gentleman looked gloomier still, and shook his head.

"What is it ?" cried both the children. "What do you mean ?" And they seized the tips of their tongues in their fingers, to feel for themselves.



But the hot-tempered gentleman went slowly out of the room without answering ; passing his hands through his hair, and saying, " Ah ! Hum ! " and nodding with an air of grave foreboding.

Just as he crossed the threshold, he turned back, and put his head into the room. " Have you ever noticed that your tongues are growing pointed ? " he asked.

"No!" cried the children with alarm. "Are they?"

"If ever you find them becoming forked," said the gentleman in solemn tones, "let me know."

With which he departed, gravely shaking his head.

In the afternoon the children attacked him again.

"*Do* tell us what's the matter with our tongues."

"You were snapping and squabbling just as usual this morning," said the hot-tempered gentleman.

"Well, we forgot," said Polly. "We don't mean anything, you know. But never mind that now, please. Tell us about our tongues. What is going to happen to them?"

"I'm very much afraid," said the hot-tempered gentleman in solemn measured tones, "that you are both of you—fast—going—to—the—"

"Dogs?" suggested Harry, who was learned in cant expressions.

"Dogs!" said the hot-tempered gentleman, driving his hands through his hair. "Bless your life, no! Nothing half so pleasant! (That is, unless all dogs were like Snap, which mercifully they are not.) No, my sad fear is, that you are both of you—rapidly—going—to the *Snap Dragons!*"

And not another word would the hot-tempered gentleman say on the subject.

CHRISTMAS EVE.

IN the course of a few hours Mr. and Mrs. Skratdj recovered their equanimity. The punch was brewed in a jug, and tasted quite as good as usual. The evening was very lively. There were a Christmas tree, Yule cakes, log, and candles, furnety, and snap-dragon after supper. When the company was tired of the tree, and had gained

an appetite by hard exercise of stretching to high branches, blowing out "dangerous" tapers, and cutting ribbon and pack-thread in all directions, supper came, with its welcome cakes and furmety and punch. And when furmety somewhat palled upon the taste (and it must be admitted to boast more sentiment than flavor as a Christmas dish), the Yule candles were blown out and both the spirits and the palates of the party were stimulated by the mysterious and pungent pleasures of snap-dragon.

Then, as the hot-tempered gentleman warmed his coat-tails at the Yule-log, a grim smile stole over his features as he listened to the sounds in the room. In the darkness the blue flames leaped and danced, the raisins were snapped and snatched from hand to hand, scattering fragments of flame hither and thither. The children shouted as the fiery sweetmeats burnt away the mawkish taste of the furmety. Mr. Skratdj cried that they were spoiling the carpet; Mrs. Skratdj complained that he had spilled some brandy on her dress. Mr. Skratdj retorted that she should not wear dresses so susceptible of damage in the family circle. Mrs. Skratdj recalled an old speech of Mr. Skratdj on the subject of wearing one's nice things for the benefit of one's family, and not reserving them for visitors. Mr. Skratdj remembered that Mrs. Skratdj's excuse for buying that particular dress when she did not need it, was her intention of keeping it for the next year. The children disputed as to the credit for courage and the amount of raisins due to each. Snap barked furiously at the flames; and the maids hustled each other for good places in the doorway, and would not have allowed the man-servant to see at all, but he looked over their heads.

"St! St! At it! At it!" chuckled the hot-tempered gentleman in undertones. And when he said this, it seemed as if the voices of Mr. and Mrs. Skratdj rose in higher matrimonial repartee, and the children's squabbles became louder, and the dog yelped as if he were

mad, and the maid's contest was sharper ; whilst the snap-dragon flames leaped up and up, and blue fire flew about the room like foam.

At last the raisins were finished, the flames were all but out, and the company withdrew to the drawing-room. Only Harry lingered.

"Come along, Harry," said the hot-tempered gentleman.

"Wait a minute," said Harry.

"You had better come," said the gentleman.



"Why," said Harry.

"There's nothing to stop for. The raisins are eaten, the brandy is burnt out——"

"No, it's not," said Harry.

"Well, almost. It would be better if it were quite out. Now come. It's dangerous for a boy like you to be alone with the Snap-Dragons to-night."

"Fiddle-sticks !"

"Go your own way, then !" said the hot-tempered gentleman ; and he bounced out of the room, and Harry was left alone.

DANCING WITH THE DRAGONS.

He crept up to the table, where one little pale blue flame flickered in the snap-dragon dish.

"What a pity it should go out!" said Harry. At this moment the brandy bottle on the side-board caught his eye.

"Just a little more," murmured Harry to himself; and he uncorked the bottle, and poured a little brandy on to the flame.

Now of course, as soon as the brandy touched the fire, all the brandy in the bottle blazed up at once, and the bottle split to pieces; and it was very fortunate for Harry that he did not get seriously hurt. A little of the hot brandy did get into his eyes, and made them smart, so that he had to shut them for a few seconds.

UT when he opened them again, what a sight he saw! All over the room the blue flames leaped and danced in the soup-plate with the raisins. And Harry saw that each successive flame was the fold in the long body of a

bright blue Dragon, which moved like the body of a snake. And the room was full of these Dragons. In the face they were like the dragons one sees made of very old blue and white china; and they had forked tongues, like the tongues of serpents. They were most beautiful in color, being sky-blue. Lobsters who have just changed



their coats are very handsome, but the violet and indigo of a lobster's coat is nothing to the brilliant sky-blue of a Snap-Dragon.

How they leaped about ! They were for ever leaping over each other, like seals at play. But if it was "play" at all with them, it was of a very rough kind ; for as they jumped, they snapped and barked at each other, and their barking was like that of the barking Gnu in the Zoological Gardens ; and from time to time they tore the hair out of each other's heads with their claws, and scattered it about the floor. And as it dropped it was like the flecks of flame people shake from their fingers when they are eating snap-dragon raisins.

Harry stood aghast.

"What fun !" said a voice close by him ; and he saw that one of the Dragons was lying near, and not joining in the game. He had lost one of the forks of his tongue by accident, and could not bark for a while.

"I'm glad you think it funny," said Harry, "I don't."

"That's right. Snap away !" sneered the Dragon. "You're a perfect treasure. They'll take you in with them the third round."

"Not those creatures ?" cried Harry.

"Yes, those creatures. And if I hadn't lost my bark, I'd be the first to lead you off," said the Dragon. "Oh, the game will exactly suit you."

"What is it, please ?" Harry asked.

"You'd better not say, 'please' to the others," said the Dragon, "if you don't want to have all your hair pulled out. The game is this. You have always to be jumping over somebody else, and you must either talk or bark. If anybody speaks to you, you must snap in return. I need not explain what *snapping* is. *You know*. If anyone by accident gives a civil answer, a claw-full of hair is torn out of his head to stimulate his brain. Nothing can be funnier."

"I dare say it suits you capitally," said Harry ; "but I'm sure we

shouldn't like it. I mean men and women and children. It wouldn't do for us at all."

"Wouldn't it?" said the Dragon. "You don't know how many human beings dance with dragons on Christmas Eve. If we are kept going in a house till after midnight, we can pull people out of their beds, and take them to dance in Vesuvius."

"Vesuvius!" cried Harry.

"Yes, Vesuvius. We come from Italy originally, you know. Our skins are the color of the Bay of Naples. We live on dried grapes and ardent spirits. We have glorious fun in the mountain sometimes. Oh! what snapping, and scratching, and tearing! Delicious! There are times when the squabbling becomes too great, and Mother Mountain won't stand it, and spits us all out, and throws cinders after us. But this is only at times. We had a charming meeting last year. So many human beings, and how they *can* snap! It was a choice party. So very select. We always have plenty of saucy children and servants. Husbands and wives too, and quite as many of the former as the latter, if not more. But besides these, we had two vestry-men, a country post-master, who devoted his talents to insulting the public instead of to learning the postal regulations, three cabmen and two "fares," two young shop-girls from a Berlin wool shop in a town where there was no competition, four commercial travellers, six landladies, six Old Bailey lawyers, several widows from almshouses, seven single gentlemen and nine cats, who swore at everything; a dozen sulphur-colored screaming cockatoos; a lot of street children from a town; a pack of mongrel curs from the colonies, who snapped at the human beings' heels, and five elderly ladies in their Sunday bonnets with Prayer-books, who had been fighting for good seats in church."

"Dear me!" said Harry.

"If you can find nothing sharper to say than 'Dear me,'" said the



Dragon, "you will fare badly, I can tell you. Why, I thought you'd a sharp tongue, but it's not forked yet, I see. Here they are, however. Off with you! And if you value your curls—Snap!"

And before Harry could reply, the Snap-dragons came on on their third round, and as they passed they swept Harry with them.

He shuddered as he looked at his companions. They were as transparent shrimps, but of this lovely cerulæan blue. And as they leaped they barked—"Howf! Howf?"—like barking Gnus; and when they leaped Harry had to leap with them. Besides barking, they snapped and wrangled with each other; and in this Harry must join also.

"Pleasant, isn't it?" said one of the blue Dragons.

"Not at all," snapped Harry.

"That's your bad taste," snapped the blue Dragon.

"No it's not!" snapped Harry.

"Then it's pride and perverseness. You want your hair combing."

"Oh, please don't!" shrieked Harry, forgetting himself. On which the Dragon clawed a handful of hair out of his head, and Harry screamed, and the blue Dragons barked and danced.

"That made your hair curl, didn't it?" asked another Dragon, leaping over Harry.

"That's no business of yours," Harry snapped, as well as he could for crying.

"It's more my pleasure than business," retorted the Dragon.

"Keep it to yourself, then," snapped Harry.

"I mean to share it with you, when I get hold of your hair," snapped the Dragon.

"Wait till you get the chance," Harry snapped, with desperate presence of mind.

"Do you know whom you're talking to?" roared the Dragon; and he opened his mouth from ear to ear, and shot out his forked tongue in Harry's face; and the boy was so frightened that he forgot to snap, and cried piteously.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, please don't!"

On which the blue Dragon clawed another handful of hair out of his head, and all the Dragons barked as before.

How long the dreadful game went on Harry never exactly knew

Well practised as he was in snapping in the nursery, he often failed to think of a retort, and paid for his unreadiness by the loss of his hair. Oh, how foolish and wearisome all this rudeness and snapping now seemed to him ! But on he had to go, wondering all the time how near it was to twelve o'clock, and whether the Snap-Dragons would stay till midnight and take him with them to Vesuvius.

At last, to his joy, it became evident that the brandy was coming to an end. The Dragons moved slower, they could not leap so high, and at last one after another they began to go out.

"Oh, if they only all of them get away before twelve !" thought poor Harry.

At last there was only one. He and Harry jumped about and snapped and barked, and Harry was thinking with joy that he was the last, when the clock in the hall gave that whirring sound which some clocks do before they strike, as if it were clearing its throat.

"Oh, *please* go !" screamed Harry in despair.

The blue Dragon leaped up, and took such a clawfull of hair out of the boy's head, that it seemed as if part of the skin went too. But that leap was his last. He went out at once, vanishing before the first stroke of twelve. And Harry was left on his face on the floor in the darkness.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN his friends found him there was blood on his forehead. Harry thought it was where the Dragon had clawed him, but they said it was a cut from a fragment of the broken bottle. The Dragons had disappeared as completely as the brandy.

Harry was cured of snapping. He had had quite enough of it for a lifetime, and the catch-contradictions of the household made him



shudder. Polly had not had the benefit of his experiences, and yet she improved also.

In the first place, snapping, like other kinds of quarreling, requires two parties to it, and Harry would never be a party to snapping any more. And when he gave civil and kind answers to Polly's smart speeches, she felt ashamed of herself, and did not repeat them.

In the second place, she heard about the Snap-Dragons. Harry told all about it to her and to the hot-tempered gentleman.

"Now do you think it's true?" Polly asked the hot-tempered gentleman.

"Hum! Ha!" said he, driving his hands through his hair. "You know I warned you, you were going to the Snap-Dragons."

* * * * *

Harry and Polly snubbed "the little ones" when they snapped, and utterly discountenanced snapping in the nursery. The example and admonitions of elder children are a powerful instrument of nursery discipline, and before long there was not a "sharp tongue" amongst all the little Skratdjs.

But I doubt if the parents ever were cured. I don't know if they heard the story. Besides, bad habits are not easily cured when one is old.

I fear Mr. and Mrs. Skratdj have yet got to dance with the Dragons.

THE PEACE EGG.

A CHRISTMAS TALE



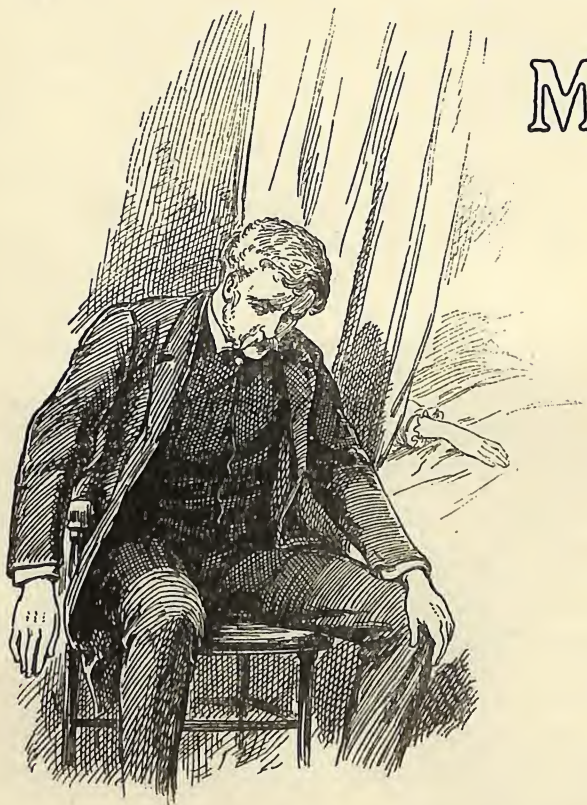
EVERY one ought to be happy at Christmas. But there are many things which ought to be, and yet are not; and people are sometimes sad even in the Christmas holidays.

The captain and his wife were sad, though it was Christmas Eve. Sad, though they were in the prime of life, blessed with good health, devoted to each other and to their children, with competent means, a comfortable house on a little freehold property of their own, and, one might say, everything that heart could desire. Sad, though they were good people, whose peace of mind had a firmer foundation than their earthly goods alone; contented people, too, with plenty of occupation for mind and body. Sad—and in the nursery this was held to be past all reason—though the children were performing that ancient and most entertaining Play or Christmas Mystery of Good St. George of England, known as *The Peace Egg*, for their benefit and behoof alone.

The play was none the worse that most of the actors were too young to learn parts, so that there was very little of the rather tedious dialogue, only plenty of dress and ribbons, and of fighting with the wooden swords. But though St. George looked bonny enough to

warm any father's heart, as he marched up and down with an air learned by watching many a parade in barrack-square and drill-ground, and though the Valiant Slasher did not cry in spite of falling hard and the Doctor treading accidentally on his little finger in picking him up, still the captain and his wife sighed nearly as often as they smiled, and the mother dropped tears as well as pennies into the cap which the King of Egypt brought round after the performance.

THE CAPTAIN'S WIFE.



MANY many years back the Captain's wife had been a child herself, and had laughed to see the village mummers act the Peace Egg, and had been quite happy on Christmas Eve. Happy, though she had no mother. Happy, though her father was a stern man, very fond of his only child, but with an obstinate will that not even she dared thwart. She had lived to thwart it, and he had never forgiven her. It was

when she married the Captain. The old man had a prejudice against

soldiers, which was quite reason enough, in his opinion, for his daughter to sacrifice the happiness of her future life by giving up the soldier she loved. At last he gave her her choice between the Captain and his own favor and money. She chose the Captain, and was disowned and disinherited.

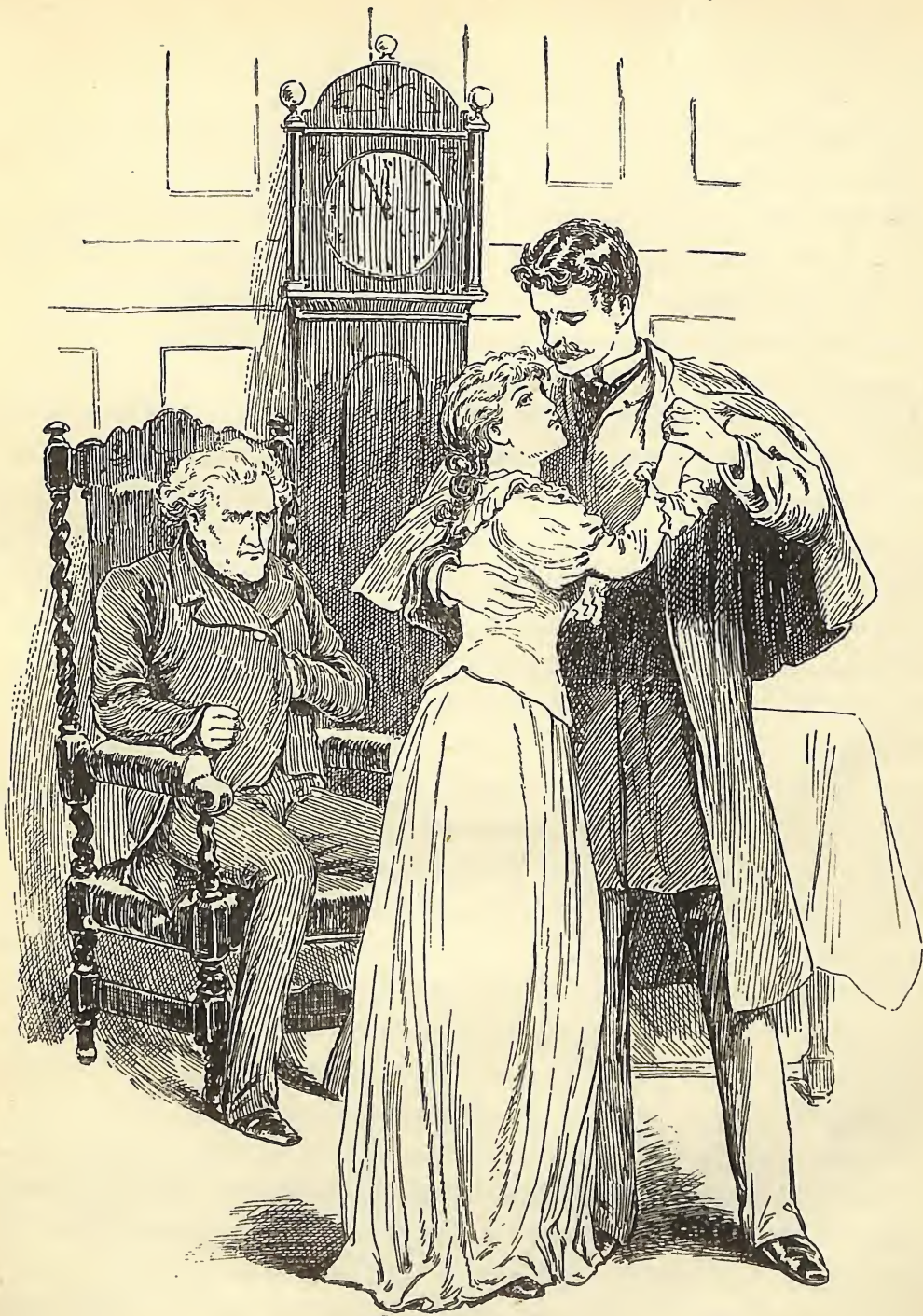
The Captain bore a high character, and was a good and clever officer, but that went for nothing against the old man's whim. He made a very good husband too; but even this did not move his father-in-law, who had never held any intercourse with him or his wife since the day of their marriage, and who had never seen his own grand-children. Though not so bitterly prejudiced as the old father, the Captain's wife's friends had their doubts about the marriage. The place was not a military station, and they were quiet country folk who knew very little about soldiers, whilst what they imagined was not altogether favorable to "red-coats" as they called them. Soldiers are well-looking generally, it is true (and the Captain was more than well-looking—he was handsome); brave, of course it is their business (and the Captain had V.C. after his name and several bits of ribbon on his patrol jacket). But then, thought the good people, they are here to-day and gone to-morrow, you "never know where you have them;" they are probably in debt, possibly married to several women in foreign countries, and, though they are very courteous in society, who knows how they treat their wives when they drag them off from their natural friends and protectors to distant lands where no one can call them to account?

"Ah, poor thing!" said Mrs. John Bull, junior, as she took off her husband's coat on his return from business, a week after the Captain's wedding, "I wonder how she feels? There's no doubt the old man behaved disgracefully; but it's a great risk marrying a soldier. It stands to reason, military men aren't domestic; and I wish—Lucy Jane, fetch your papa's slippers, quick!—she'd had the sense to

settle down comfortably amongst her friends with a man who would have taken care of her."

"Officers are a wild set, I expect," said Mr. Bull, complacently, as he stretched his limbs in his own particular armchair, into which no member of his family ever intruded. "But the red-coats carry the day with plenty of girls who ought to know better. You women are always caught by a bit of finery. However, there's no use our bothering *our* heads about it. As she brewed she must bake."

The captain's wife's baking was lighter and more palatable than her friends believed. The captain (who took off his own coat when he came home, and never wore slippers but in his dressing-room) was domestic enough. A selfish companion must, doubtless, be a great trial amid the hardships of military life, but when a soldier is kind-hearted, he is often a much more helpful and thoughtful and handy husband than any equally well-meaning civilian. Amid the ups and downs of their wanderings, the discomforts of shipboard and of stations in the colonies, bad servants, and unwonted sicknesses, the Captain's tenderness never failed. If the life was rough the Captain was ready. He had been, by turns, in one strait or another, sick-nurse, doctor, carpenter, nursemaid, and cook to his family, and had, moreover, an idea that nobody filled these offices quite so well as himself. Withal, his very profession kept him neat, well-dressed, and active. In the roughest of their ever-changing quarters he was a smarter man, more like the lover of his wife's young days, than Mr. Bull amid his stationary comforts. Then if the Captain's wife was—as her friends said—"never settled," she was also for ever entertained by new scenes; and domestic mischances do not weigh very heavily on people whose possessions are few and their intellectual interests many. It is true that there were ladies in the Captain's regiment who passed by sea and land from one quarter of the globe to another, amid strange climates and customs, strange trees and



“ He gave her her choice between the Captain and his own favor and money.
She chose the Captain.”—PAGE 51

flowers, beasts and birds, from the glittering snows of North America to the orchids of the Cape, from beautiful Pera to the lily-covered hills of Japan, and who in no place rose above the fret of domestic worries, and had little to tell on their return but of the universal misconduct of servants, from Irish "helps" in the colonies, to *compradors* and China-boys at Shanghai. But it was not so with the Captain's wife. Moreover, one becomes accustomed to one's fate, and she moved her whole establishment from the Curragh to Curfu with less anxiety than that felt by Mrs. Bull over a port-wine stain on the best table-cloth.

And yet, as years went and children came, the Captain and his wife grew tired of travelling. New scenes were small comfort when they heard of the death of old friends. One foot of murky English sky was dearer, after all, than miles of the unclouded heavens of the South. The gray hills and over-grown lanes of her old home haunted the Captain's wife by night and day, and home-sickness (that weariest of all sicknesses) began to take the light out of her eyes before their time. It preyed upon the Captain too. Now and then he would say, fretfully, "I *should* like an English resting-place, however small, before *everybody* is dead! But the children's prospects have to be considered." The continued estrangement from the old man was an abiding sorrow also, and they had hopes that, if only they could get to England, he might be persuaded to peace and charity this time.

At last they were sent home. But the hard old father still would not relent. He returned their letters unopened. This bitter disappointment made the Captain's wife so ill that she almost died, and in one month the Captain's hair became iron gray. He reproached himself for ever having taken the daughter from her father, "to kill her at last," as he said. And (thinking of his own children) he even reproached himself for having robbed the old widower of his only child. After two years at home his regiment was ordered to India.

He failed to effect an exchange, and they prepared to move once more—from Chatham to Calcutta. Never before had the packing to which she was so well accustomed, been so bitter a task to the Captain's wife.

It was at the darkest hour of this gloomy time that the Captain came in, waving above his head a letter which changed all their plans.

Now close by the old home of the Captain's wife there had lived a man, much older than herself, who yet had loved her with a devotion as great as that of the young Captain. She never knew it, for when he saw that she had given her heart to his younger rival, he kept silence, and he never asked for what he knew he might have had—the old man's authority in his favor. So generous was the affection which he could never conquer, that he constantly tried to reconcile the father to his children whilst he lived, and, when he died, he bequeathed his house and small estate to the woman he loved.

"It will be a legacy of peace," he thought, on his death-bed. "The old man cannot hold out when she and her children are constantly in sight. And it may please God that I shall know of the reunion I have not been permitted to see with my eyes."

And thus it came about that the Captain's regiment went to India without him, and that the Captain's wife and her father lived on opposite sides of the same road.

MASTER ROBERT.

THE eldest of the Captain's children was a boy. He was named Robert, after his grandfather, and seemed to have inherited a good deal of the old gentleman's character, mixed with gentler traits. He was a fair fine boy, tall and stout for his age, with the Captain's regular features, and (he flattered himself) the Captain's firm step and

martial bearing. He was apt—like his grandfather—to hold his own will to be other people's law, and (happily for the peace of the nursery) this opinion as devoutly shared by his brother Nicholas.



Though the Captain had sold his commission, Robin continued to command an irregular force of volunteers in the nursery, and never was colonel more despotic. His brothers and sister were by turn infantry, cavalry, engineers, and artillery, according to his whim, and when his affections finally settled upon the Highlanders of "The Black Watch," no female power could compel him to keep his stockings above his knees, or his knickerbockers below them.

The Captain alone was a match for his strong-willed son.

"If you please, sir," said Sarah, one morning, flouncing in upon the Captain, just as he was about to start for the neighboring town,—“If you please, sir, I wish you'd speak to Master Robert. He's past my powers.”

"I've no doubt of it," thought the Captain, but he only said, "Well, what's the matter?"

"Night after night do I put him to bed," said Sarah, "and night after night does he get up as soon as I'm out of the room, and says he's orderly officer for the evening, and goes about in his night-shirt and his feet as bare as boards."

The Captain fingered his heavy mustache to hide a smile, but he listened patiently to Sarah's complaints.

"It ain't so much *him* I should mind, sir," she continued, "but he goes round the beds and wakes up the other young gentlemen and Miss Dorä, one after another, and when I speak to him, he gives me all the sauce he can lay his tongue to, and says he's going round the

guards. The other night I tried to put him back in his bed, but he got away and ran all over the house, me hunting him everywhere, and not a sign of him, till he jumps out on me from the garret-stairs and nearly knocks me down. 'I've visited the outposts, Sarah,' says he; 'all's well.' And off he goes to bed as bold as brass."

"Have you spoken to your mistress?" asked the Captain.

"Yes, sir," said Sarah. "And missis spoke to him, and he promised not to go round the guards again."

"Has he promised?" asked the Captain, with a look of anger, and also of surprise.

"When I opened the door last night, sir," continued Sarah, in her shrill treble, "what should I see in the dark but Master Robert a-walking up and down with the carpet-brush stuck in his arm. 'Who goes there?' says he. 'You owdacious boy!' says I, 'Didn't you promise your ma you'd leave off them tricks?' 'I'm not going round the guards,' says he; 'I promised not. But I'm for sentry-duty to-night.' And say what I would to him, all he had for me was, 'You mustn't speak to a sentry on duty.' So I says, 'As sure as I live till morning, I'll go to your pa,' for he pays no more attention to his ma than to me, nor to any one else."

"Please to see that the chair-bed in my dressing-room is moved into your mistress's bedroom," said the Captain. "I will attend to Master Robert."

With this Sarah had to content herself, and she went back to the nursery. Robert was nowhere to be seen, and made no reply to her summons. On this the unwary nursemaid flounced into the bedroom to look for him, when Robert, who was hidden beneath a table, darted forth, and promptly locked her in.

"You're under arrest," he shouted, through the keyhole.

"Let me out!" shrieked Sarah.

"I'll send a file of the guard to fetch you to the orderly-room, by-

and-by," said Robert, "for 'preferring frivolous complaints.'" And he departed to the farmyard to look at the ducks.

That night when Robert went up to bed, the Captain quietly locked him into his dressing-room, from which the bed had been removed.

"You're for sentry duty, to-night," said the Captain. "The carpet-brush is in the corner. Good-evening."

As his father anticipated, Robert was soon tired of the sentry game in these new circumstances, and long before the night had half worn away he wished himself safely undressed and in his own comfortable bed. At half-past twelve o'clock he felt as if he could bear it no longer, and knocked at the Captain's door.

"Who goes there?" said the Captain.

"Mayn't I go to bed, please?" whined poor Robert.

"Certainly not," said the Captain. "You're on duty."

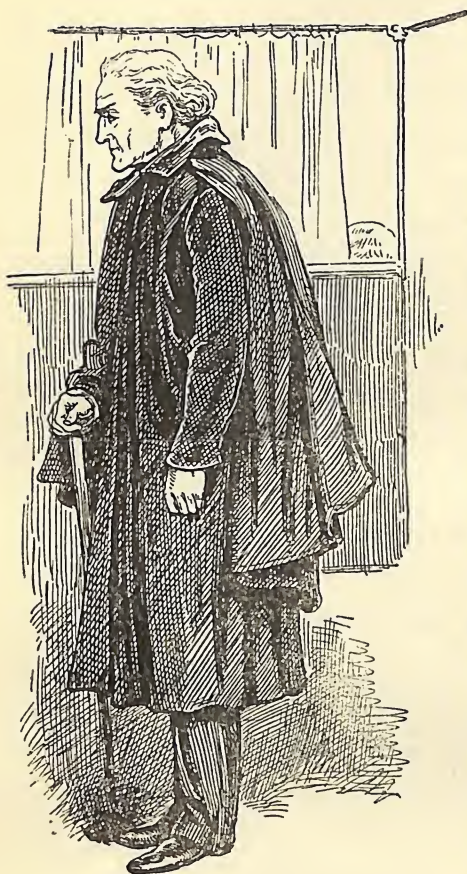
And on duty poor Robert had to remain, for the Captain had a will as well as his son. So he rolled himself up in his father's railway rug, and slept on the floor.

The next night he was very glad to go quietly to bed, and remain there.

IN THE NURSERY.

THE Captain's children sat at breakfast in a large bright nursery. It was the room where the old bachelor had died, and now *her* children made it merry. This was just what he would have wished.

They all sat round the table, for it was breakfast-time. There were five of them, and five bowls of boiled bread-and-milk smoked before them. Sarah (a foolish, gossiping girl, who acted as nurse till better could be found) was waiting on them, and by the table sat Darkie, the black retriever, his long curly back swaying slightly from



the difficulty of holding himself up, and his solemn hazel eyes fixed very intently on each and all of the breakfast bowls. He was as silent and sagacious as Sarah was talkative and empty-headed. The expression of his face was that of King Charles I. as painted by Vandyke. Though large, he was unassuming. Pax, the pug, on the contrary, who came up to the first joint of Darkie's leg, stood defiantly on his dignity (and his short stumps). He always placed himself in front of the bigger dog, and made a point of hustling him in doorways and of going first downstairs. He strutted like a beadle, and carried his tail more tightly than a bishop's crook. He looked, as one may imagine the frog in

the fable would have looked, had he been able to swell himself rather nearer to the size of the ox. This was partly due to his very prominent eyes, and partly due to an obesity favored by habits of lying inside the fender, and of eating meals proportioned more to his consequence than to his hunger. They were both favorites of two years' standing, and had very nearly been given away, when the good news came of an English home for the family, dogs and all.

Robert's tongue was seldom idle, even at meals. "Are you a Yorkshirewoman, Sarah?" he asked, pausing, with his spoon full in his hand.

"No, Master Robert," said Sarah.

"But you understand Yorkshire, don't you? I can't, very often; but Mamma can, and can speak it, too. Papa says Mamma always talks Yorkshire to servants and poor people. She used to talk Yorkshire to Themistocles, Papa said, and he said it was no good; for though Themistocles knew a lot of languages, he didn't know that. And Mamma laughed, and said she didn't know she did."—"Themistocles was our man-servant in Corfu," Robin added, in explanation. "He stole lots of things, Themistocles did; but Papa found him out."

Robin now made a rapid attack on his bread-and-milk, after which he broke out again.

"Sarah, who is that tall old gentleman at church, in the seat near the pulpit? He wears a cloak like what the Blues wear, only all blue, and is tall enough for a Life-guardsman. He stood when we were kneeling down, and said, *Almighty and most merciful Father* louder than anybody."

Sarah knew who the old gentleman was, and knew also that the children did not know, and that their parents did not see fit to tell them as yet. But she had a passion for telling and hearing news, and would rather gossip with a child than not gossip at all. "Never you mind, Master Robin," she said, nodding sagaciously. "Little boys aren't to know everything."

"Ah, then, I know you don't know," replied Robert; "if you did you'd tell. Nicholas, give some of your bread to Darkie and Pax. I've done mine. *For what we have received the Lord make us truly thankful.* Say your grace and put your chair away, and come along. I want to hold a court-martial." And seizing his own chair by the seat, Robin carried it swiftly to its corner. As he passed Sarah he observed tauntingly, "You pretend to know, but you don't."

"I do," said Sarah.

"You don't," said Robin.

"Your ma's forbid you to contradict, Master Robin," said Sarah ; "and if you do I shall tell her. I know well enough who the old gentleman is, and perhaps I might tell you, only you'd go straight off and tell again."

"No, no, I wouldn't!" shouted Robin. "I can keep a secret, indeed I can! Pinch my little finger, and try. Do, do tell me, Sarah, and then I shall know you know." And he danced round her catching at her skirts.

To keep a secret was beyond Sarah's powers.

"Do let my dress be, Master Robin," she said, "you're ripping out all the gathers, and listen while I whisper. As sure as you're a living boy, that gentleman's your own grandpapa."

Robin lost his hold on Sarah's dress ; his arms fell by his side, and he stood with his brows knit for some minutes, thinking. Then he said, emphatically, "What lies you do tell, Sarah!"

"Oh, Robin!" cried Nicholas, who had drawn near, his thick curls standing stark with curiosity, "Mamma said 'lies' wasn't a proper word, and you promised not to say it again."

"I forgot," said Robin. "I didn't mean to break my promise. But she does—ahem!—*you know what.*"

"You wicked boy!" cried the enraged Sarah ; "how dare you say such a thing, and everybody in the place know he's your ma's own pa."

"I'll go and ask her," said Robin, and he was at the door in a moment ; but Sarah, alarmed by the thought of getting into a scrape herself, caught him by the arm.

"Don't you go, love ; it'll only make your ma angry. There ; it was all my nonsense."

"Then it's not true?" said Robin, indignantly. "What did you tell me so for?"

"It was all my jokes and nonsense," said the unscrupulous Sarah.

"But your ma wouldn't like to know I've said such a thing. And Master Robert wouldn't be so mean as to tell tales, would he, love?"

"I'm not mean," said Robin, stoutly; "and I don't tell tales; but you do, and you tell *you know what*, besides. However, I won't go this time; but I'll tell you what—if you tell tales of me to Papa any more, I'll tell him what you said about the old gentleman in the blue cloak." With which parting threat Robin strode off to join his brothers and sister.

Sarah's tale had put the court-martial out of his head, and he leaned against the tall fender, gazing at his little sister, who was tenderly nursing a well-worn doll. Robin sighed.

"What a long time that doll takes to wear out, Dora!" said he. "When will it be done?"

"Oh, not yet, not yet!" cried Dora, clasping the doll to her, and turning away. "She's quite good, yet."

"How miserly you are," said the brother; "and selfish, too; for you know I can't have a military funeral till you'll let me bury that old thing."

Dora began to cry.

"There you go, crying!" said Robin, impatiently. "Look here: I won't take it till you get the new one on your birthday. You can't be so mean as not to let me have it then!"

But Dora's tears still fell. "I love this one so much," she sobbed. "I love her better than the new one."

"You want both; that's it," said Robin, angrily. "Dora, you're the meanest girl I ever knew!"

At which unjust and painful accusation Dora threw herself and the doll upon their faces, and wept bitterly. The eyes of the soft-hearted Nicholas began to fill with tears, and he squatted down before her, looking most dismal. He had a fellow-feeling for her attachment to an old toy, and yet Robin's will was law to him.

"Couldn't we make a coffin, and pretend the body was inside?" he suggested.

"No, we couldn't," said Robin. "I wouldn't play the Dead March after an empty candle-box. It's a great shame--and I promised she should be chaplain in one of my night-gowns, too."

"Perhaps you'll get just as fond of the new one," said Nicholas, turning to Dora.

But Dora only cried, "No, no! He shall have the new one to bury, and I'll keep my poor, dear, darling Betsy." And she clasped Betsy tighter than before.

"That's the meanest thing you've said yet," retorted Robin; "for you know Mamma wouldn't let me bury the new one." And, with an air of great disgust, he quitted the nursery.

"A MUMMING WE WILL GO."



NICHOLAS had sore work to console his little sister, and Betsy's prospects were in a very unfavorable state, when a diversion was caused in her favor by a new whim which put the military funeral out of Robin's head.

After he left the nursery he strolled out of doors, and, peeping through the gate at the end of the drive, he saw a party of boys going through what looked like a military exercise with sticks and a good deal of stamping; but, instead of mere words of command, they all spoke by turns, as in a play. In spite of their strong Yorkshire accent, Robin overheard a good deal, and it sounded very fine. Not being at all shy,

he joined them, and asked so many questions that he soon got to know all about it. They were practising a Christmas mumming-play called "The Peace Egg." Why it was called thus they could not tell him, as there was nothing whatever about eggs in it, and so far from being a play of peace, it was made up of a series of battles between certain valiant knights and princes, of whom St. George of England was the chief and conqueror. The rehearsal being over, Robin went with the boys to the sexton's house (he was father to the "King of Egypt") where they showed him the dresses they were to wear. These were made of gay-colored materials, and covered with ribbons, except that of the "Black Prince of Paradine," which was black, as became his title. The boys also showed him the book from which they learned their parts, and which was to be bought for one penny at the post-office shop.

"Then are you the mummers who come round at Christmas, and act in people's kitchens, and people give them money, that Mamma used to tell us about?" said Robin.

St. George of England looked at his companions as if for counsel as to how far they might commit themselves, and then replied, with Yorkshire caution, "Well, I suppose we are."

"And do you go out in the snow from one house to another 'at night; and oh, don't you enjoy it?" cried Robin.

"We like it well enough," St. George admitted.

Robin bought a copy of the "The Peace Egg." He was resolved to have a nursery performance, and to act the part of St. George himself. The others were willing for what he wished, but there were difficulties. In the first place, there are eight characters in the play, and there were only five children. They decided among themselves to leave out the "Fool," and Mamma said that another character was not to be acted by any of them, or indeed mentioned; "the little one who comes in at the end," Robin explained. Mamma had her

reasons, and these were always good. She had not been altogether pleased that Robin had bought the play. It was a very old thing, she said, and very queer ; not adapted for a child's play. If Mamma thought the parts not quite fit for the children to learn, they found them much too long ; so in the end she picked out some bits for each which they learned easily, and which, with a good deal of fighting, made quite as good a story of it as if they had done the whole. What may have been wanting otherwise was made up for by the dresses, which were charming.

Robin was St. George, Nicholas the valiant Slasher, Dora the Doctor, and the other two Hector and the King of Egypt. "And now we've no Black Prince !" cried Robin in dismay.

"Let Darkie be the Black Prince !" said Nicholas. "When you wave your stick he'll jump for it, and then you can pretend to fight with him."

"It's not a stick, it's a sword," said Robin. "However, Darkie may be the Black Prince."

"And what's Pax to be ?" asked Dora ; "for you know he will come if Darkie does, and he'll run in before everybody else too."

"Then he must be the Fool," said Robin, "and it will do very well, for the Fool comes in before the rest, and Pax can have his red coat on, and the collar with the little bells."





CHRISTMAS EVE.

ROBIN thought that Christmas would never come. To the Captain and his wife it seemed to come too fast. They had hoped it might bring reconciliation with the old man, but it seemed they hoped in vain.

There were times now when the Captain almost regretted the old bachelor's bequest.

The familiar scenes of her old home sharpened his wife's grief. To see her father every Sunday in Church, with marks of age and infirmity upon him, but with not a look of tenderness for his only child, this tried her sorely.

"She felt it less abroad," thought the Captain. "An English home in which she frets herself to death is, after all, no great boon."

Christmas Eve came.

"I'm sure it's quite Christmas enough now," said Robin. "We'll have 'The Peace Egg' to-night."

So as the Captain and his wife sat sadly over their fire, the door opened, and Pax ran in shaking his bells, and followed by the nursery mummers. The performance was most successful. It was by no means pathetic, and yet, as has been said, the Captain's wife shed tears.

"What is the matter, Mamma?" said St. George, abruptly dropping his sword and running up to her.

"Don't tease Mamma with questions," said the captain; "she is not very well, and rather sad. We must all be very kind and good to poor dear Mamma;" and the Captain raised his wife's hands to his lips as he spoke. Robin seized the other hand and kissed it tenderly. He was very fond of his mother. At this moment Pax took a little

run, and jumped on to Mamma's lap, where, sitting facing the company, he opened his black mouth and yawned, with a ludicrous inappropriateness worthy of any clown. It made everybody laugh.

"And now we'll go and act in the kitchen," said Nicholas.

"Supper at nine o'clock, remember," shouted the Captain. "And we are going to have real frumenty and Yule cakes, such as Mamma used to tell us of when we were abroad."

"Hurrray!" shouted the mummers, and they ran off, Pax leaping from his seat just in time to hustle the Black Prince in the doorway. When the dining-room door shut, St. George raised his hand, and said "Hush!"

The mummers pricked their ears, but there was only a distant harsh and scraping sound, as of stones rubbed together.

"They're cleaning the passages," St. George went on, "and Sarah told me they meant to finish the mistletoe, and have everything cleaned up by suppertime. They don't want us, I know. Look here, we'll go *real mumming* instead. That *will* be fun!"

The Valiant Slasher grinned with delight.

"But will Mamma let us?" he inquired.

"Oh, it will be all right if we're back by supper-time," said St. George, hastily. "Only of course we must take care not to catch cold. Come and help me to get some wraps."

The old oak chest in which spare shawls, rugs, and coats were kept was soon ransacked, and the mummers' gay dresses hidden by motley wrappers. But no sooner did Darkie and Pax behold the coats, &c., than they at once began to leap and bark, as it was their custom to do when they saw any one dressing to go out. Robin was sorely afraid that this would betray them; but though the Captain and his wife heard the barking they did not guess the cause.

So the front door being very gently opened and closed, the nursery mummers stole away.

THE NURSERY MUMMERS AND THE OLD MAN.

It was a very fine night. The snow was well-trodden on the drive, so that it did not wet their feet, but on the trees and shrubs it hung soft and white.

"It's much jollier being out at night than in the daytime," said Robin.

"Much," responded Nicholas, with intense feeling.

"We'll go a wassailing next week," said Robin. "I know all about it, and perhaps we shall get a good lot of money, and then we'll buy tin swords with scabbards for next year. I don't like these sticks. Oh, dear, I wish it wasn't so long between one Christmas and another."

"Where shall we go first?" asked Nicholas, as they turned into the high road. But before Robin could reply, Dora clung to Nicholas, crying, "Oh, look at those men!"

The boys looked up the road, down which three men were coming in a very unsteady fashion, and shouting as they rolled from side to side.

"They're drunk," said Nicholas; "and they're shouting at us."

"Oh, run, run!" cried Dora: and down the road they ran, the men shouting and following them. They had not run far, when Hector caught his foot in the Captain's great coat, which he was wearing, and came down headlong in the road. They were close by a gate, and when Nicholas had set Hector upon his legs, St. George hastily opened it.

"This is the first house," he said. "We'll act here;" and all, even the Valiant Slasher, pressed in as quickly as possible. Once safe within the grounds, they shouldered their sticks, and resumed their composure.

"You're going to the front door," said Nicholas. "Mummers ought to go to the back."

"We don't know where it is," said Robin, and he rang the front-door bell. There was a pause. Then lights shone, steps were heard, and at last a sound of much unbarring, unbolting, and unlocking. It might have been a prison. Then the door was opened by an elderly, timid-looking woman who held a tallow candle above her head.

"Who's there?" she said, "at this time of night."

"We're Christmas mummers," said Robin, stoutly; "we didn't know the way to the back door, but——"

"And don't you know better than to come here?" said the woman. "Be off with you, as fast as you can."

"You're only the servant," said Robin. "Go and ask your master and mistress if they wouldn't like to see us act. We do it very well."

"You impudent boy, be off with you!" repeated the woman. "Master'd no more let you nor any other such rubbish set foot in this house——"

"Woman!" shouted a voice close behind her, which made her start as if she had been shot, "who authorizes you to say what your master will or will not do, before you've asked him? The boy is right. You *are* the servant, and it is not your business to choose for me whom I shall or shall not see."

"I meant no harm, sir, I'm sure," said the housekeeper; "but I thought you'd never——"

"My good woman," said her master, "if I had wanted somebody to think for me, you're the last person I should have employed. I hire you to obey orders, not to think."

"I'm sure, sir," said the housekeeper, whose only form of argument was reiteration, "I never thought you would have seen them——"

"Then you were wrong," shouted her master. "I will see them. Bring them in."

He was a tall, gaunt old man, and Robin stared at him for some minutes, wondering where he could have seen somebody very like him. At last he remembered. It was the old gentleman of the blue cloak.

The children threw off their wraps, the housekeeper helping them, and chattering ceaselessly, from sheer nervousness.

"Well, to be sure," said she, "their dresses are pretty, too. And they seem quite a better sort of children, they talk quite genteel. I might ha' known they weren't like common mummers, but I was so flusterated hearing the bell go so late, and——"

"Are they ready?" said the old man, who had stood like a ghost in the dim light of the flaring tallow candle, grimly watching the proceedings.

"Yes, sir. Shall I take them to the kitchen, sir?"

"——for you and the other idle hussies to gape and grin at? No. Bring them to the library," he snapped, and then stalked off, leading the way.

The housekeeper accordingly led them to the library, and then withdrew, nearly falling on her face as she left the room by stumbling over Darkie, who slipped in last like a black shadow.

The old man was seated in a carved oak chair by the fire.

"I never said the dogs were to come in," he said.

"But we can't do without them, please," said Robin, boldly. "You see there are eight people in 'The Peace Egg,' and there are only five of us; and so Darkie has to be the Black Prince, and Pax has to be the Fool, and so we have to have them."

"Five and two make seven," said the old man, with a grim smile; "what do you do for the eighth?"

"Oh, that's the little one at the end," said Robin, confidentially. "Mamma said we weren't to mention him, but I think that's because we're children.—You're grown up, you know, so I'll show you the

book, and you can see for yourself," he went on, drawing "The Peace Egg" from his pocket: "there, that's the picture of him, on the last page; black, with horns and a tail."

The old man's stern face relaxed into a broad smile as he examined the grotesque woodcut; but when he turned to the first page the smile vanished in a deep frown, and his eyes shone like hot coals with anger. He had seen Robin's name.

"Who sent you here?" he asked, in a hoarse voice. "Speak, and speak the truth! Did your mother send you here?"

Robin thought the old man was angry with them for playing truant. He said, slowly, "N—no. She didn't exactly send us; but I don't think she'll mind our having come if we get back in time for supper. Mamma never *forbid* our going mumming, you know."

"I don't suppose she ever thought of it," Nicholas said, candidly, wagging his curly head from side to side.

"She knows we're mummers," said Robin, "for she helped us. When we were abroad, you know, she used to tell us about the mummers acting at Christmas, when she was a little girl; and so we thought we'd be mummers, and so we acted to Papa and Mamma, and so we thought we'd act to the maids, but they were cleaning the passages, and so we thought we'd really go mumming; and we've got several other houses to go to before supper-time; we'd better begin, I think," said Robin; and without more ado he began to march round raising his sword and shouting,—

"I am St. George, who from Old England sprung,
My famous name throughout the world hath rung."

And the performance went off quite as creditably as before.

As the children acted the old man's anger wore off. He watched them with an interest he could not repress. When Nicholas took some hard thwacks from St. George without flinching, the old man clapped his hands; and, after the encounter between St. George

and the Black Prince, he said he would not have had the dogs excluded on any consideration. It was just at the end, when they were all marching round and round, holding on by each other's swords "over the shoulder," and singing "A mumming we will go, &c," that Nicholas suddenly brought the circle to a standstill by stopping dead short, and staring up at the wall before him.

"What *are* you stopping for?" said St. George, turning indignantly round.

"Look there!" cried Nicholas, pointing to a little painting which hung above the old man's head.

Robin looked, and said, abruptly, "It's Dora."

"Which is Dora?" asked the old man, in a strange sharp tone.

"Here she is," said Robin and Nicholas in one breath, as they dragged her forward.

"She's the Doctor," said Robin; "and you can't see her face for her things. Dor, take off your cap and pull back that hood. There! Oh, it *is* like her!"

It was a portrait of her mother as a child; but of this the nursery mummies knew nothing. The old man looked as the peaked cap and hood fell away from Dora's face and fair curls, and then he uttered a sharp cry, and buried his head upon his hands. The boys stood stupefied, but Dora ran up to him, and putting her little hands on his arms, said, in childish pitying tones, "Oh, I am so sorry! Have you got a headache? May Robin put the shovel in the fire for you? Mamma has hot shovels for her headaches." And, though the old man did not speak or move, she went on coaxing him, and stroking his head, on which the hair was white. At this moment Pax took one of his unexpected runs, and jumped on to the old man's knee, in his own particular fashion, and then yawned at the company. The old man was startled, and lifted his face suddenly. It was wet with tears.

"Why, you're crying!" exclaimed the children with one breath.

"It's very odd," said Robin, fretfully. "I can't think what's the matter to-night. Mamma was crying too when we were acting, and Papa said we weren't to tease her with questions, and he kissed her hand too. And papa said we must all be very good and kind to poor dear Mamma, and so I mean to be, she's so good. And I think we'd better go home, or perhaps she'll be frightened," Robin added.

"She's so good, is she?" asked the old man. He had put Pax off his knee, and taken Dora on to it.

"Oh, isn't she!" said Nicholas, swaying his curly head from side side to side as usual.

"She's always good," said Robin emphatically; "and so's Papa. But I'm always doing something I oughtn't to," he added, slowly. "But then, you know, I don't pretend to obey Sarah. I don't care a fig for Sarah; and I won't obey any woman but Mamma."

"Who's Sarah?" asked the grandfather.

"She's our nurse," said Robin, "and she tells—I mustn't say what she tells—but it's not the truth. She told one about *you* the other day," he added.

"About me?" said the old man.

"She said you were our grandpapa. So then I knew she was telling *you know what*."



"How did you know it wasn't true?" the old man asked.

"Why, of course," said Robin, "if you were our Mamma's father, you'd know her, and be very fond of her, and come and see her. And then you'd have us to see you, and perhaps give us Christmas-boxes. I wish you were," Robin added with a sigh. "It would be very nice."

"Would *you* like it?" asked the old man of Dora.

And Dora, who was half asleep and very comfortable, put her little arms about his neck as she was wont to put them round the Captain's, and said, "Very much."

He put her down at last, very tenderly, almost unwillingly, and left the children alone. By-and-by he returned, dressed in the blue cloak, and took Dora again.

"I will see you home," he said.

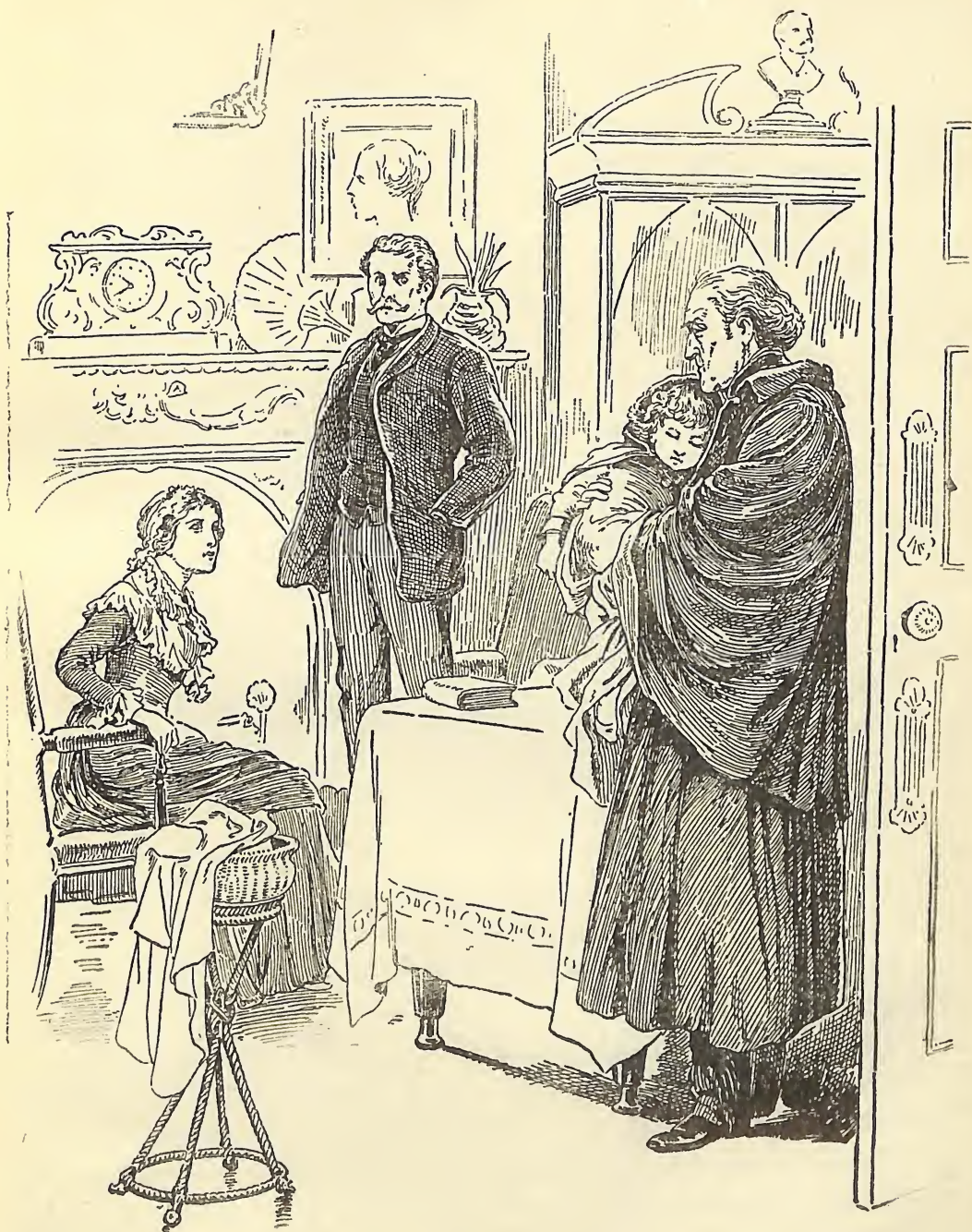
The children had not been missed. The clock had only just struck nine when there came a knock on the door of the dining-room, where the Captain and his wife sat by the Yule log. She said, "Come in," wearily, thinking it was the frumenty and the Christmas cakes.

But it was her father, with her child in his arms!

PEACE AND GOODWILL.

LUCY Jane Bull and her sisters were quite old enough to understand a good deal of grown-up conversation when they overheard it. Thus, when a friend of Mrs. Bull's observed during an afternoon call that she believed that "officers' wives were very dressy," the young ladies were at once resolved to keep a sharp look-out for the Captain's wife's bonnet in church on Christmas Day.

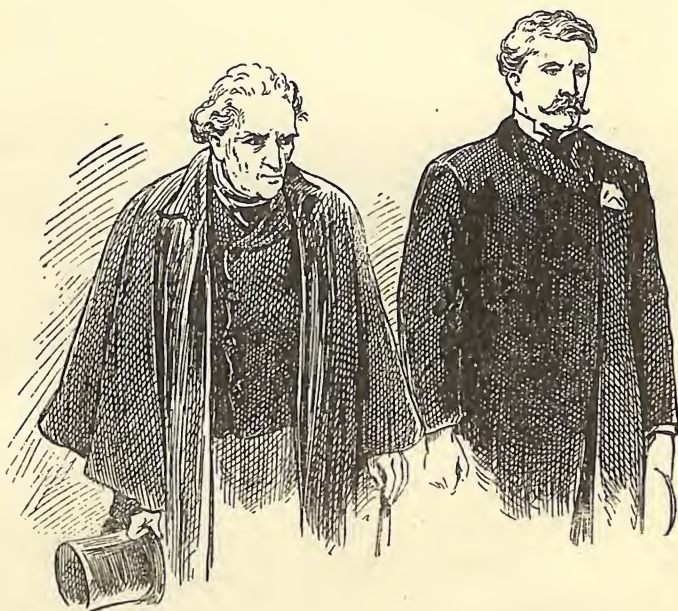
The Bulls had just taken their seats when the Captain's wife came



"It was her father, with her child in his arms!"—PAGE 74

in. They really would have hid their faces, and looked at the bonnet afterwards, but for the startling sight that met the gaze of the congregation. The old grandfather walked into church abreast of the Captain.

"They've met in the porch," whispered Mr. Bull under the shelter of his hat.



"They can't quarrel publicly in a place of worship," said Mrs. Bull, turning pale.

"She's gone into his seat," cried Lucy Jane in a shrill whisper.

"And the children after her," added the other sister incautiously aloud.

There was now no doubt about the matter. The old man in his blue cloak stood for a few moments politely disputing the question of precedence with his handsome son-in-law. Then the Captain bowed and passed in, and the old man followed him.

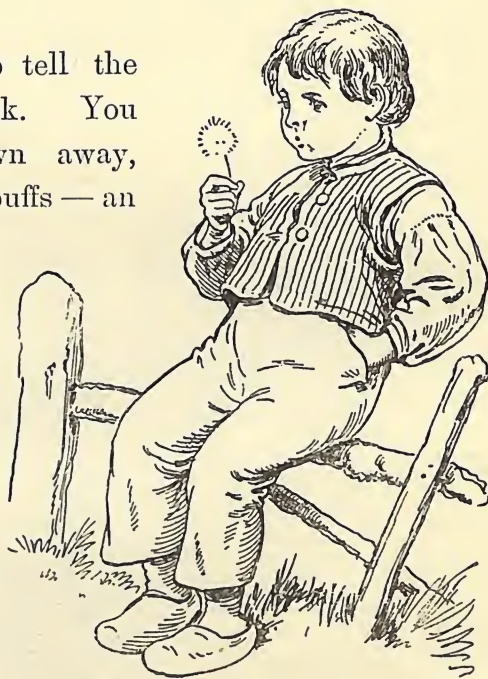
By the time that the service was ended everybody knew of the happy peacemaking, and was glad. One old friend after another came up with blessings and good wishes. This was a proper Christmas, indeed, they said. There was a general rejoicing.

But only the grandfather and his children knew that it was hatched from "The Peace Egg."



DANDELION CLOCKS

EVERY child knows how to tell the time by a dandelion clock. You blow till the seed is all blown away, and you count each of the puffs — an hour to a puff. Every child knows this, and very few children want to know any more on the subject. It was Peter Paul's peculiarity that he always did want to know more about everything; a habit whose first and foremost inconvenience is that one can so seldom get people to answer one's questions.



Peter Paul and his two sisters were playing in the pastures. Rich, green, Dutch pastures, unbroken by hedge or wall, which stretched —like an emerald ocean—to the horizon and met the sky. The cows stood ankle-deep in it and chewed the cud, the clouds sailed slowly over it to the sea, and on a dry hillock sat Mother, in her broad sun-hat, with one eye to the cows and one to the linen she was bleaching, thinking of her farm.

Peter Paul and his sisters had found another little hillock where, among some tufts of meadow-flowers which the cows had not yet

eaten, were dandelion clocks. They divided them quite fairly, and began to tell each other the time of day.

Little Anna blew very hard for her size and as the wind blew too, her clock was finished in a couple of puffs. "One, two. It's only two o'clock," she said with a sigh.

Her elder sister was more careful, but still the wind was against them. "One, two, three. It's three o'clock by me," she said.

Peter Paul turned his back to the wind, and held his clock low. "One, two, three, four, five. It's five o'clock by my dandelion—I wonder why the fairy clocks all go differently."

"We blow differently," said his sister.

"Then they don't really tell the time," said Peter Paul.

"Oh yes, they do—the fairy time."

And the little girls got more clocks, and turned their backs to the wind in imitation of Peter Paul, and went on blowing. But the boy went up to his mother.

"Mother, why do dandelion clocks tell different time? It was only two o'clock by Anna's, and three o'clock by Leena's, and five by mine. It can't really be evening with me and only afternoon with Anna. The days don't go quicker with one person than another, do they?"

"Drive Daisy and Buttermilk nearer this way," said his mother; "and if you must ask questions, ask your Uncle Jacob."

There was a reason for sending the boy to Uncle Jacob with his difficulties. He had been born after his father's death, and Uncle Jacob had taken up the paternal duties. It was he who had chosen the child's name. He had called him Peter Paul after Peter Paul Rubens, not that he hoped the boy would become a painter, but he wished him to be called after some great man, and—having just returned from Antwerp—the only great man he could think of was Peter Paul.

“Give a boy a great name,” said Uncle Jacob, “and if there’s any stuff in him, there’s a chance he’ll live up to it.”

This was a kindly way of putting the proverb about giving a dog a bad name, and Uncle Jacob’s strongest quality was kindness—kindness and the cultivation of tulips.

He was sitting in the summer-house smoking, and reading over a bulb-list when Peter Paul found him.



“Uncle Jacob, why do dandelion clocks tell different time to different people? Sixty seconds make a minute, sixty minutes make an hour, twenty-four hours make a day, three hundred and sixty-five days make a year. That right, isn’t it? Hours are the same length for everybody, aren’t they? But if I got to teatime when it was only two o’clock with Anna, and went on like that, first the days and then the years would go much quicker with me, and I don’t know if I should die sooner,—but it couldn’t be, could it?”

"Certainly not," said Uncle Jacob; and he went on with his list. "Yellow Pottebakker, Yellow Tournesol and Yellow Rose."

"Then the fairy clocks tell lies?" said Peter Paul.

"That you must ask Godfather Time," replied Uncle Jacob jocosely. "He is responsible for the clocks and the hour-glasses."

"Where does he live?" asked the boy.

But Uncle Jacob had spread the list on the summer-house table; he was fairly immersed in it and in a cloud of tobacco smoke, and Peter Paul did not like to disturb him.

"Twenty-five Bybløemens, twenty-five Bizards, twenty-five Roses, and a seedling-bed for first bloom this year."

Some of Uncle Jacob's seedling tulips were still "breeders," whose future was yet unmarked * (he did not name them in hope, as he had christened his nephew!) when Peter Paul went to sea.

He was quite unfitted for a farmer. He was always looking forward to what he should do hereafter, or backward to the time when he believed in fairy clocks. Now a farmer should live in the present, and time himself by a steady going watch with an enamelled face. Then little things get done at the right time, which is everything in farming.

"Peter Paul puzzles too much," said his mother, "and that is your fault, Jacob, for giving him a great name. But while he's thinking, Daisy misses her mash and the hens lay away. He'll never make a farmer. Indeed, for that matter, men never farm like women, and Leena will take to it after me. She knows all my ways."

They were a kindly family, with no minds to make this short life bitter for each other by thwarting, as so many well-meaning relatives do; so the boy chose his own trade and went to sea.

* The first bloom of seedling tulips is usually without stripes or markings and it is often years before they break into stripes; till then they are called breeders, and are not named.

He saw many places and many people ; he saw a great deal of life, and came face to face with death more than once, and under strange shapes. He found answers to a lot of old questions, and then new ones came in their stead. Each year seemed to hold more than a life-time at home would have held, and yet how quickly the years went by !

A great many had gone by when Peter Paul set foot once more upon Dutch soil.

“And it only seems like yesterday that I went away !” said he.

Mother was dead. That was the one great change. Peter Paul’s sisters had inherited the farm. They managed it together, and they had divided their mother’s clothes, and also her rings and ear-rings, her gold skull-cap and head-band and pins—the heirlooms of a Dutch farmeress.

“It matters very little how we divide them, dear,” Anna had said, “for I shall never marry, and they will all go to your girl.”

The elder sister was married and had two children. She had grown up very pretty—a fair woman, with liquid misleading eyes. They looked as if they were gazing into the far future, but they did not see an inch beyond the farm. Anna was a very plain copy of her in body, in mind she was the elder sister’s echo. They were very fond of each other, and the prettiest thing about them was their faithful love for their mother, whose memory was kept as green as pastures after rain.

On Sunday Peter went with them to her grave and then to service. The ugly little church, the same old clerk, even the look of that part of the seat where Peter Paul had kicked the paint off during sermons—all strengthened the feeling that it could only have been a few days since he was there before.

As they walked home he told his sisters about the various religious services he had seen abroad. They were curious to hear about them,

under a sort of protest, for they disapproved of every form of worship but their own.

"The music in some of the cathedrals is very beautiful," said Peter Paul. "And the choristers in their gowns, singing as they come, always affect me. No doubt only some are devout at heart, and others careless—which is also the case with the congregation—but outward reverence is, at the lowest, an acknowledgment of what we owe, and for my own part it helps me. Those white figures are not angels I know; but they make one think of them, and I try to be worthier of singing God's praises with them."

There was a little pause, and Leena's beautiful eyes were full of reflections.

Presently she said, "Who washes all the white gowns?"

"I really don't know," said Peter Paul.

"I fancy they don't bleach anywhere as they do in Holland," she continued. "Indeed, Brother, I doubt if Dutchwomen are what they were. No one bleaches as Mother did. Mother bleached beautifully."

"Yes, she bleached beautifully," said Anna.

Peter Paul was only to be three weeks at home before he sailed again; but when ten days were over, he began to think the rest of the time would never come to an end. And this was from no want of love for his sisters, or of respect for their friends. One cannot help having an irritable brain, which rides an idea to the moon and home again, without stirrups, whilst some folks are getting the harness of words on to its back. There had been hours in his youth when all the unsolved riddles, the untasted joys, the great possibilities of even a common existence like his, so pressed upon him, that the shortness of the longest life of man seemed the most pitiable thing about it. But when he took tea with Vrow Schmidt and her daughters, and supper-time would not come, Peter Paul thought of the penance of the Wandering Jew, and felt very sorry for him.

The sisters would have been glad if Peter Paul would have given up the sea and settled down with them. Leena had a plan of her own for it. She wanted him to marry Vrow Schmidt's niece, who had a farm.

"But I am afraid you do not care for young ladies?" said she.

Peter Paul got red.

"Vrow Schmidt's niece is a very nice young lady," said he.

He was not thinking of Vrow Schmidt's niece, he was thinking of something else—something for which he would have liked a little sympathy; but he doubted whether Leena could give it to him. Indeed, to cure heartache is Godfather Time's business, and even he is not invariably successful. It was probably a sharp twinge that made Peter Paul say, "Have you never wondered that when one's life is so very short, one can manage to get so much pain into it?"

Leena dropped her work and looked up. "You don't say so?" said she. "Dear Brother, is it rheumatism? I'm sure it must be a dreadful risk being out on the masts in the night air, without a roof over your head. But do you wear flannel, Peter Paul? Mother was very much troubled with rheumatism latterly. She thought it was the dews at milking time, and she always wore flannel."

"Yes, dear, Mother always wore flannel," said Anna.

Peter Paul satisfied them on this head. He wore flannel, red flannel too, which has virtues of its own.

Leena was more anxious than ever that he should marry Vrow Schmidt's niece, and be taken good care of.

But it was not to be: Peter Paul went back to his ship and into the wide world again.

Uncle Jacob would have given him an off-set of his new tulip—a real novelty, and named—if he had had any place to plant it in.

"I've a bed of breeders that will be worth looking at next time you come home," said he.

Leena walked far over the pastures with Peter Paul. She was very fond of him, and she had a woman's perception that they would miss him more than he could miss them.



"I am very sorry you could not settle down with us," she said, and her eyes brimmed over.

Peter Paul kissed the tears tenderly from her cheeks.

"Perhaps I shall when I am older, and have shaken off a few more of my whims into the sea. I'll come back yet, Leena, and live very

near to you and grow tulips, and be as good an old bachelor-uncle to your boy as Uncle Jacob was to me."

"And if a foreign wife would suit you better than one of the Schmidt's," said Leena, re-arranging his bundle for him, "don't think we sha'n't like her. Any one you love will be welcome to us, Peter Paul—as welcome as you have been."

When they got to the hillock where Mother used to sit, Peter Paul took her once more into his arms.

"Good-bye, good Sister," he said. "I have been back in my childhood again, and God knows that it is both pleasant and good for one."

"And it is funny that you should say so," said Leena, smiling through her tears; "for when we were children you were never happy except in thinking of when you should be a man."

"And there sit your children, just where we used to play," said Peter Paul.

"They are blowing dandelion clocks," said Leena, and she called them. "Come and bid Uncle Peter good-bye."

He kissed them both.

"Well, what o'clock is it?" said he. The boy gave one mighty puff and dispersed his fairy clock at a breath.

"One o'clock," he cried stoutly.

"One, two, three, four o'clock," said the girl. And they went back to their play.

And Leena stood by them, with Mother's old sun-hat on her young head, and watched Peter Paul's figure over the flat pastures till it was an indistinguishable speck.

He turned back a dozen times to wave his hands to her, and to the children telling the fairy time.

But he did not ask now why dandelion clocks go differently with different people. Godfather Time had told him. He teaches us many things.

THE BLIND MAN AND THE TALKING DOG



THERE was once an old man whom Fortune (whose own eyes are bandaged) had deprived of his sight. She had taken his hearing also, so that he was deaf. Poor he had always been, and as Time had stolen his youth and strength from him, they had only left a light burden for Death to carry when he should come the old man's way.

But Love (who is blind also) had given the Blind Man a Dog, who led him out in the morning to a seat in the sun under the crab-tree, and held his hat for wayside alms, and brought him safely home at sunset.

The Dog was wise and faithful—as dogs often are—but the wonder of him was that he could talk. In which will be seen the difference between dogs and men, most of whom talk; whilst it is a matter for admiration if they are wise and faithful.

One day the Mayor's little son came down the road, and by the hand he held his playmate Aldegunda.

"Give the poor blind man a penny," said she.

"You are always wanting me to give away my money," replied the boy peevishly. "It is well that my father is the richest man in the town, and that I have a whole silver crown yet in my pocket."

But he put the penny into the hat which the Dog held out, and the Dog gave it to his master.

"Heaven bless you," said the Blind Man.

"Amen," said the Dog.

"Aldegunda ! Aldegunda !" cried the boy, dancing with delight. "Here is a dog who can talk. I would give my silver crown for him. Old man, I say, old man ! Will you sell me your dog for a silver crown ?"

"My master is deaf as well as blind," said the Dog."

"What a miserable old creature he must be," said the boy compassionately.

"Men do not smile when they are miserable, do they ?" said the Dog ; "and my master smiles sometimes—when the sun warms right through our coats to our bones ; when he feels the hat shake against his knee as the pennies drop in ; and when I lick his hand."

"But for all that, he is a poor wretched old beggar, in want of everything," persisted the boy. "Now I am the Mayor's only son, and he is the richest man in the town. Come and live with me, and I will give the Blind Man my silver crown. I should be perfectly happy if I had a talking dog of my own."

"It is worth thinking of," said the Dog. "I should certainly like a master who was perfectly happy. You are sure that there is nothing else that you wish for ?"

"I wish I were a man," replied the boy. "To do exactly as I chose, and have plenty of money to spend, and holidays all the year round."

"That sounds well," said the Dog. "Perhaps I had better wait till you grow up. There is nothing else that you want, I suppose ?"



"I want a horse," said the boy, "a real black charger. My father ought to know that I am too old for a hobby-horse. It vexes me to look at it."

"I must wait for the charger, I see," said the Dog. "Nothing vexes you but the hobby-horse I hope?"

"Aldegunda vexes me more than anything," answered the boy, with an aggrieved air; "and it's very hard when I am so fond of her. She always tumbles down when we run races, her legs are so short. It's her birthday to-day, but she toddles as badly as she did yesterday, though she's a year older."

"She will have learned to run by the time that you are a man," said the Dog. "So nice a little lady can give you no other cause of annoyance, I am sure?"

The boy frowned.

"She is always wanting something. She wants something now, I see. What do you want, Aldegunda?"

"I wish—" said Aldegunda, timidly, "I should like—the blind man to have the silver crown, and for us to keep the penny, if you can get it back out of the hat."

"That's just the way you go on," said the boy angrily. "You always think differently from me. Now remember, Aldegunda, I won't marry you when you grow big, unless you agree with what I do, like the wife in the story of 'What the Goodman does is sure to be right.'"

On hearing this, Aldegunda sobbed till she burst the strings of her hat, and the boy had to tie them afresh.

"I won't marry you at all if you cry," said he.

But at that she only cried the more, and they went away bickering into the green lanes.

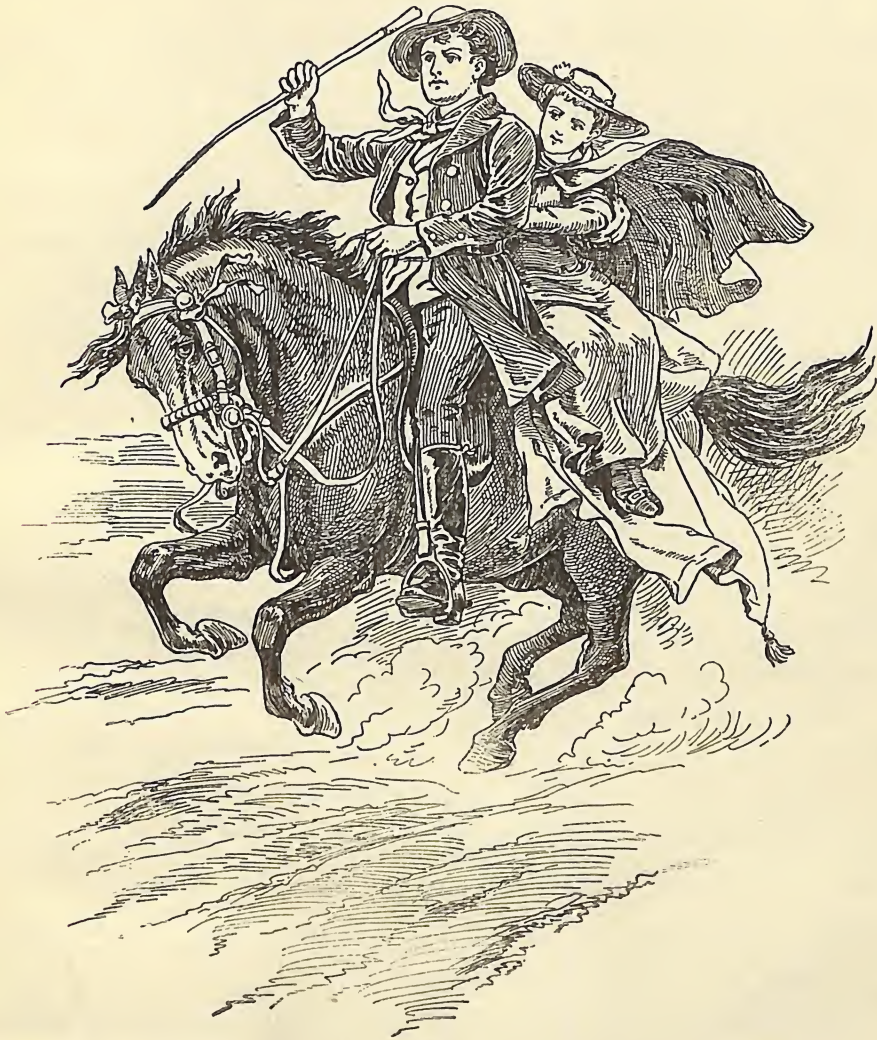
As to the old man, he heard nothing; and when the dog licked his withered hand, he smiled.

Many a time did the boy return with his playmate to try and get the Talking Dog. But the Dog always asked if he had yet got all that he wanted, and, being an honorable child, the boy was too truthful to say that he was content when he was not.

"The day that you want nothing more but me I will be your dog," it said. "Unless, indeed, my present master should have attained perfect happiness before you."

"I am not afraid of that," said the boy.

In time the Mayor died, and his widow moved to her native town and took her son with her.



Years passed, and the Blind Man lived on ; for when one gets very old and keeps very quiet in his little corner of the world, Death seems sometimes to forget to remove him.

Years passed, and the Mayor's son became a man, and was strong and rich, and had a fine black charger. Aldegunda grew up also.

She was very beautiful, wonderfully beautiful, and Love (who is blind) gave her to her old playmate.

The wedding was a fine one, and when it was over the bridegroom mounted his black charger and took his bride behind him, and rode away into the green lanes.

"Ah, what delight!" he said. "Now we will ride through the town where we lived when we were children; and if the Blind Man is still alive, you shall give him a silver crown; and if the Talking Dog is alive, I shall claim him, for to-day I am perfectly happy and want nothing."

Aldegunda thought to herself—"We are so happy, and have so much, that I do not like to take the Blind Man's dog from him;" but she did not dare to say so. One—if not two—must bear and forbear to be happy even on one's wedding day

By-and-bye they rode under the crab-tree, but the seat was empty. "What has become of the Blind Man?" the Mayor's son asked of a peasant who was near.

"He died two days ago," said the peasant. "He is buried to-day, and the priest and chanters are now returning from the grave."

"And the Talking Dog?" asked the young man.

"He is at the grave now," said the peasant; "but he has neither spoken nor eaten since his master died."

"We have come in the nick of time," said the young man triumphantly, and he rode to the churchyard.

By the grave was the dog, as the man had said, and up the winding path came the priest and his young chanters, who sang with shrill clear voices—"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord."

"Come and live with me, now your old master is gone," said the young man, stooping over the dog. But he made no reply.

"I think he is dead, sir," said the grave-digger.

"I don't believe it," said the young man fretfully. "He was an

Enchanted Dog, and he promised I should have him when I could say what I am ready to say now. He should have kept his promise."

But Aldegunda had taken the dog's cold head into her arms, and her tears fell fast over it.

"You forget," she said; "he promised to come to you when you were happy, if his old master were not happy first; and, perhaps,——"

"I remember that you always disagree with me," said the young man, impatiently. "You always did do so. Tears on our wedding-day, too! I suppose the truth is that no one is happy."

Aldegunda made no answer, for it is not from those one loves that he will willingly learn that with a selfish and imperious temper happiness never dwells.

And as they rode away again into the green lanes, the shrill voices of the chanters followed them—"Blessed are the dead. Blessed are the dead."



“SO-SO”



BE sure, my child," said the widow to her little daughter, "that you always do just as you are told."

"Very well, Mother."

"Or at any rate do what will do just as well," said the small house-dog as he lay blinking at the fire.

"You darling!" cried little Joan and she sat down on the hearth and hugged him. But he got

up and shook himself and moved three turns nearer the oven, to be out of the way; for though her arms were soft she had kept her doll in them, and that was made of wood, which hurts.

"What a dear, kind house-dog you are!" said little Joan, and she meant what she said, for it does feel nice to have the sharp edges of one's duty a little softened off for one.

He was no particular kind of dog, but he was very smooth to stroke, and had a nice way of blinking with his eyes, which it was soothing to see. There had been a difficulty about his name. The name of the house-dog before him was Faithful, and well it became him, as his tombstone testified. The one before that was called Wolf. He was

very wild, and ended his days on the gallows, for worrying sheep. The little house-dog never chased anything, to the widow's knowledge. There was no reason whatever for giving him a bad name, and she thought of several good ones, such as Faithful, and Trusty, and Keeper, which are fine old-fashioned titles, but none of these seemed quite perfectly to suit him. So he was called So-so; and a very nice soft name it is.

The widow was only a poor woman, though she contrived by her industry to keep a decent home together, and to get now one and now another little comfort for herself and her child.

One day she was going out on business, and she called her little daughter and said to her, "I am going out for two hours. You are too young to protect yourself and the house, and So-so is not as strong as Faithful was. But when I go, shut the house-door and bolt the big wooden bar, and be sure that you do not open it for any reason whatever till I return. If strangers come, So-so may bark, which he can do as well as a bigger dog. Then they will go away. With this summer's savings I have bought a quilted petticoat for you and a duffle cloak for myself against the winter, and if I get the work I am going after to-day, I shall buy enough wool to knit warm stockings for us both. So be patient till I return, and then we will have the plum-cake that is in the cupboard for tea."

"Thank you, Mother."

"Good-bye, my child. Be sure you do just as I have told you," said the widow.

"Very well, Mother."

Little Joan laid down her doll, and shut the house-door and fastened the big bolt. It was very heavy, and the kitchen looked gloomy when she had done it.

"I wish Mother had taken us all three with her, and had locked the house and put the key in her big pocket, as she has done before,"

said little Joan, as she got into the rocking-chair, to put her doll to sleep.

"Yes, it would have done just as well," So-so replied as he stretched himself on the hearth.

By-and-bye Joan grew tired of hushabying the doll, who looked none the sleepier for it, and she took the three-legged stool and sat down in front of the clock to watch the hands. After a while she drew a deep sigh.

"There are sixty seconds in every minute, So-so," said she.

"So I have heard," said So-so. He was snuffing in the back place, which was not usually allowed.

"And sixty whole minutes in every hour, So-so."

"You don't say so!" growled So-so. He had not found a bit, and the cake was on the top shelf. There was not so much as a spilt crumb, though he snuffed in every corner of the kitchen, till he stood snuffing under the house-door.

"The air smells fresh," he said.

"It's a beautiful day, I know," said little Joan. "I wish Mother had allowed us to sit on the doorstep. We could have taken care of the house——"

"Just as well," said So-so.

Little Joan came to smell the air at the keyhole, and, as So-so had said, it smelt very fresh. Besides, one could see from the window how fine the evening was.

"It's not exactly what Mother told us to do," said Joan, "but I do believe——"

"It would do just as well," said So-so.

By-and-bye little Joan unfastened the bar, and opened the door, and she and the doll and So-so went out and sat on the doorstep.

Not a stranger was to be seen. The sun shone delightfully. An evening sun, and not too hot. All day it had been ripening the

corn in the field close by, and this glowed and waved in the breeze.

"It does just as well, and better," said little Joan, "for if anyone comes we can see him coming up the field-path."



"Just so," said So-so blinking in the sunshine.

Suddenly Joan jumped up.

"Oh!" cried she, "there's a bird, a big bird. Dear So-so, can you see him? I can't because of the sun. What a queer noise he makes. Crake! crake! Oh, I can see him now! He is not flying, he is running, and he has gone into the corn. I do wish I were in the corn, I would catch him, and put him in a cage."

"I'll catch him," said So-so, and he put up his tail, and started off.

"No, no!" cried Joan. "You are not to go. You must stay and take care of the house, and bark if anyone comes."

"You could scream, and that would do just as well," replied So-so, with his tail still up.

"No, it wouldn't," cried little Joan.

"Yes, it would," reiterated So-so.

Whilst they were bickering, an old woman came up to the door; she had a brown face, and black hair, and a very old red cloak.

"Good evening, my little dear," said she. "Are you all at home this fine evening?"

"Only three of us," said Joan; "I, and my doll, and So-so. Mother has gone to the town on business, and we are taking care of the house, but So-so wants to go after the bird we saw run into the corn."

"Was it a pretty bird, my little dear?" asked the old woman.

"It was a very curious one," said Joan, "and I should like to go after it myself, but we can't leave the house."

"Dear, dear! Is there no neighbor would sit on the doorstep for you and keep the house till you just slip down to the field after the curious bird?" said the old woman.

"I'm afraid not," said little Joan. "Old Martha our neighbor, is now bedridden. Of course, if she had been able to mind the house instead of us, it would have done just as well."

"I have some distance to go this evening," said the old woman, "but I do not object to a few minutes' rest, and sooner than that you should lose the bird I will sit on the doorstep to oblige you, while you run down to the cornfield."

"But can you bark if anyone comes?" asked little Joan. "For if you can't, So-so must stay with you."

"I can call you and the dog if I see anyone coming, and that will do just as well," said the old woman.

"So it will," replied little Joan, and off she ran to the cornfield, where, for that matter, So-so had run before her, and was bounding and barking and springing among the wheat-stalks.

They did not catch the bird, though they stayed longer than they had intended, and though So-so seemed to know more about hunting than was supposed.

"I daresay Mother has come home," said little Joan as they went back up the field-path. "I hope she won't think we ought to have stayed in the house."

"It was taken care of," said So-so, "and that must do just as well."

When they reached the house, the widow had not come home.

But the old woman had gone, and she had taken the quilted petticoat and the duffle cloak, and the plumcake from the top shelf away with her; and no more was ever heard of any of the lot.

"For the future, my child," said the widow, "I hope you will always do just as you are told, whatever So-so may say."

"I will, Mother," said little Joan. (And she did.) But the house-dog sat and blinked. He dared not speak, he was in disgrace.

I do not feel quite sure about So-so. Wild dogs often amend their ways far on this side of the gallows, and the Faithful sometimes fall; but when anyone begins by being only So-so, he is apt to be So-so to the end. So-sos so seldom change.

But this one was *very* soft and nice, and he got no cake that tea-time. On the whole we will hope that he lived to be a Good Dog ever after.

THE TRINITY FLOWER

A LEGEND.

"BREAK forth, my lips, in praise, and own
The wiser love severely kind :
Since, richer for its chastening grown,
I see, whereas I once was blind."

The Clear Vision, J. G. WHITTIER.



IN days of yore there was once a certain hermit, who dwelt in a cell, which he had fashioned for himself from a natural cave in the side of a hill.

Now this hermit had a great love for flowers, and was moreover learned in the virtues of herbs, and in that great mystery of healing which lies hidden among the green things of God. And so it came

to pass that the country people from all parts came to him for the simples which grew in the little garden which he had made before his cell. And as his fame spread, and more people came to him, he added more and more to the plat which he had reclaimed from the waste land around.

But after many years there came a Spring when the colors of the flowers seemed paler to the hermit than they used to be ; and as Summer drew on, their shapes became indistinct, and he mistook one plant for another ; and when Autumn came he told them by their various scents, and by their form, rather than by sight ; and when the flowers were gone, and Winter had come, the hermit was quite blind.

Now in the hamlet below there lived a boy who had become known to the hermit on this manner. On the edge of the hermit's garden there grew two crab apple trees, from the fruit of which he made every year a certain confection, which was very grateful to the sick. One year many of these crab-apples were stolen, and the sick folk of the hamlet had very little conserve. So the following year, as the fruit was ripening, the hermit spoke every day to those who came to his cell, saying :—

“I pray you, good people, to make it known that he who robs these crab trees, robs not me alone, which is dishonest, but the sick, which is inhuman.”

And yet once more the crab-apples were taken.

The following evening, as the hermit sat on the side of the hill, he overheard two boys disputing about the theft.

“It must either have been a very big man, or a small boy, to do it,” said one. “So I say, and I have my reason.”

“And what is thy reason, Master Wiseacre ?” asked the other.

“The fruit is too high to be plucked except by a very big man,” said the first boy. “And the branches are not strong enough for any but a child to climb.”

“Canst thou think of no other way to rob an apple tree but by standing a tip-toe, or climbing up to the apples, when they should come down to thee ?” said the second boy. “Truly thy head will never save thy heels ; but here's a riddle for thee :

Riddle me riddle me re,
Four big brothers are we ;
We gather the fruit, but climb never a tree.

Who are they ? ”

“ Four tall robbers, I suppose,” said the other.

“ Tush ! ” cried his comrade. “ They are the four winds ; and when they whistle, down falls the ripest. But others can shake besides the winds, as I will shew thee if thou hast any doubts in the matter.”

And as he spoke he sprang to catch the other boy, who ran from him ; and they chased each other down the hill, and the hermit heard no more.

But as he turned to go home he said, “ The thief was not far away when thou stoodst near. Nevertheless, I will have patience. It needs not that I should go to seek thee, for what saith the Scripture ? *Thy sin* will find thee out.” And he made conserve of such apples as were left, and said nothing.

Now after a certain time a plague broke out in the hamlet ; and it was so sore, and there were so few to nurse the many who were sick, that, though it was not the wont of the hermit ever to leave his place, yet in their need he came down and ministered to the people in the village. And one day, as he passed a certain house he heard moans from within, and entering, he saw lying upon a bed a boy who tossed and moaned in fever, and cried out most miserably that his throat was parched and burning. And when the hermit looked upon his face, behold it was the boy who had given the riddle of the four winds upon the side of the hill.

Then the hermit fed him with some of the confection which he had with him, and it was so grateful to the boy’s parched palate, that he thanked and blessed the hermit aloud, and prayed him to leave a morsel of it behind, to soothe his torments in the night.

Then said the hermit, “ My Son, I would that I had more of this



confection, for the sake of others as well as for thee. But indeed I have only two trees which bear the fruit whereof this is made; and in two successive years have the apples been stolen by some thief, thereby robbing not only me, which is dishonest, but the poor, which is inhuman."

Then the boy's theft came back to his mind, and he burst into tears, and cried, "My Father, I took the crab-apples!"

And after awhile he recovered his health; the plague also abated in the hamlet, and the hermit went back to his cell. But the boy would thenceforth never leave him, always wishing to show his penitence and gratitude. And though the hermit sent him away he ever returned, saying,

"Of what avail is it to drive me from thee, since I am resolved to serve thee, even as Samuel served Eli, and Timothy ministered unto St Paul?"

But the hermit said, "My rule is to live alone, and without companions; wherefore begone."

And when the boy still came, he drove him from the garden.

Then the boy wandered far and wide, over moor and bog, and gathered rare plants and herbs, and laid them down near the hermit's cell. And when the hermit was inside, the boy came into the garden and gathered old stones and swept the paths, and tied up such plants as were drooping, and did all neatly and well, for he was a quick and skilful lad. And when the hermit said,

"Thou hast done well, and I thank thee; but now begone," he only answered,

"What avails it when I am resolved to serve thee?"

So at last there came a day when the hermit said, "It may be that it is ordained; wherefore abide, my Son."

And the boy answered, "Even so, for I am resolved to serve thee."

Thus he remained. And thenceforth the hermit's garden thrived as it had never thriven before. For, though he had skill, the hermit was old and feeble; but the boy was young and active, and he worked hard, and it was to him a labor of love. And being a clever boy, he quickly knew the names and properties of the plants as well as the hermit himself. And when he was not working, he would go

far afield to seek for new herbs. And he always returned to the village at night.

Now when the hermit's sight began to fail, the boy put him right if he mistook one plant for another; and when the hermit became quite blind, he relied completely upon the boy to gather for him the herbs that he wanted. And when anything new was planted, the boy led the old man to the spot, that he might know that it was so many paces in such a direction from the cell, and might feel the shape and texture of the leaves, and learn its scent. And through the skill and knowledge of the boy, the hermit was in no wise hindered from preparing his accustomed remedies, for he knew the names and virtues of the herbs, and where every plant grew. And when the sun shone, the boy would guide his master's steps into the garden, and would lead him up to certain flowers; but to those which had a perfume of their own the old man could go without help, being guided by the scent. And as he fingered their leaves and breathed their fragrance, he would say, "Blessed be God for every herb of the field, but thrice blessed for those that smell."

And at the end of the garden was set a bush of rosemary. "For," said the hermit, "to this we must all come." Because rosemary is the herb they scatter over the dead. And he knew where almost everything grew, and what he did not know the boy told him.

Yet for all this, and though he had embraced poverty and solitude with joy, in the service of God and man, yet so bitter was blindness to him, that he bewailed the loss of his sight, with a grief that never lessened.

"For," said he, "if it had pleased our Lord to send me any other affliction, such as a continual pain or a consuming sickness, I would have borne it gladly, seeing it would have left me free to see these herbs, which I use for the benefit of the poor. But now the sick suffer through my blindness, and to this boy also I am a continual burden."

And when the boy called him at the hours of prayer, saying, "My Father, it is now time for the Nones office, for the marygold is closing," or, "The Vespers bell will soon sound from the valley, for the bindweed bells are folded," and the hermit recited the appointed prayers, he always added,

"I beseech Thee take away my blindness, as Thou didst heal Thy servant the son of Timæus."

And as the boy and he sorted herbs, he cried,

"Is there no balm in Gilead?"

And the boy answered, "The balm of Gilead grows six full paces from the gate, my Father."

But the hermit said, "I spoke in a figure, my Son. I meant not the herb. But, alas! Is there no remedy to heal the physician? No cure for the curer?"

And the boy's heart grew heavier day by day, because of the hermit's grief. For he loved him.

Now one morning as the boy came up from the village, the hermit met him, groping painfully with his hands, but with joy in his countenance, and he said, "Is that thy step, my Son? Come in, for I have somewhat to tell thee."

And he said, "A vision has been vouchsafed to me, even a dream. Moreover, I believe that there shall be a cure for my blindness."

Then the boy was glad, and begged of the hermit to relate his dream, which he did as follows:—

"I dreamed, and behold I stood in the garden—thou also with me—and many people were gathered at the gate, to whom, with thy help, I gave herbs of healing in such fashion as I have been able since this blindness came upon me. And when they were gone, I smote upon my forehead, and said, "Where is the herb that shall heal my affliction?" And a voice beside me said, 'Here, my Son.' And I cried to thee, 'Who spoke?' And thou saidst, 'It is a man

in pilgrim's weeds, and lo, he hath a strange flower in his hand.' Then said the Pilgrim, 'It is a Trinity Flower. Moreover I suppose, that when thou hast it, thou wilt see clearly.' Then I thought that thou didst take the flower from the Pilgrim and put it in my hand. And lo, my eyes were opened, and I saw clearly. And I knew the Pilgrim's face, though where I have seen him I cannot yet recall. But I believed him to be Raphael the Archangel—he who led Tobias, and gave sight to his father. And even as it came to me to know him, he vanished ; and I saw him no more."

"And what was the Trinity Flower like, my Father?" asked the boy.

"It was about the size of Herb Paris, my son," replied the hermit. "But instead of being fourfold every way, it numbered the mystic Three. Every part was threefold. The leaves were three, the petals three, the sepals three. The flower was snow-white, but on each of the three parts it was stained with crimson stripes, like white dyed in blood."*

Then the boy started up, saying, "If there be such a plant on the earth I will find it for thee."

But the hermit laid his hand on him, and said, "Nay, my Son, leave me not, for I have need of thee. And the flower will come yet and then I shall see."

And all the day long the old man murmured to himself, "Then I shall see."

"And didst thou see me, and the garden, in thy dream, my Father?" asked the boy.

"Ay, that I did, my Son. And I meant to say to thee that it much pleaseth me that thou art grown so well, and of such a strangely fair countenance. Also the garden is such as I have never before beheld it, which must needs be due to thy care. But wherefore didst

* *Trillium erythrocarpum*. North America.

thou not tell me of those fair palms that have grown where the thorn hedge was wont to be? I was but just stretching out my hand for some, when I awoke."

"There are no palms there, my Father," said the boy.

"Now, indeed it is thy youth that makes thee so little observant," said the hermit. "However, I pardon thee, if it were only for that good thought which moved thee to plant a yew beyond the rosemary bush; seeing that the yew is the emblem of eternal life, which lies beyond the grave."

But the boy said, "There is no yew there, my Father."

"Have I not seen it, even in a vision?" cried the hermit. "Thou wilt say next that all the borders are not set with hearts-ease, which indeed must be through thy industry; and whence they come I know not, but they are most rare and beautiful, and my eyes long sore to see them again."

"Alas, my Father!" cried the boy, "the borders are set with rue, and there are but a few clumps of hearts-ease, here and there."

"Could I forget what I saw that hour?" asked the old man angrily. "And did not holy Raphael himself point to them, saying, 'Blessed are the eyes that behold this garden, where the borders are set with hearts-ease, and the hedges crowned with palm!' But thou wouldst know better than an archangel, forsooth."

Then the boy wept; and when the hermit heard him weeping, he put his arm round him and said,

"Weep not, my dear Son. And I pray thee, pardon me that I spoke harshly to thee. For indeed I am ill-tempered by reason of my infirmities; and as for thee, God will reward thee for thy goodness to me, as I never can. Moreover, I believe it is thy modesty, which is as great as thy goodness, that hath hindered thee from telling me of all that thou hast done for my garden, even to those fair and sweet everlasting flowers, the like of which I never saw before,

which thou hast set in the east border, and where even now I hear the bees humming in the sun."

Then the boy looked sadly out into the garden, and answered, "I cannot lie to thee. There are no everlasting flowers. It is the flowers of the thyme in which the bees are rioting. And in the hedge bottom there creepeth the bitter-sweet."

But the hermit heard him not. He had groped his way out into the sunshine, and wandered up and down the walks, murmuring to himself, "Then I shall see."

Now when the Summer was past, one autumn morning there came to the garden gate a man in pilgrim's weeds; and when he saw the boy he beckoned to him, and giving him a small tuber root, he said,

"Give this to thy master. It is the root of the Trinity Flower."

And he passed on down towards the valley.

Then the boy ran hastily to the hermit; and when he had told him, and given him the root, he said,

"The face of the pilgrim is known to me also, O my father! For I remember when I lay sick of the plague, that ever it seemed to me as if a shadowy figure passed in and out, and went up and down the streets, and his face was as the face of this pilgrim. But—I cannot deceive thee—methought it was the Angel of Death."

Then the hermit mused; and after a little space he answered,

"It was then also that I saw him. I remember now. Nevertheless, let us plant the root, and abide what God shall send."

And thus they did. And as Autumn and Winter went by, the hermit became very feeble but the boy constantly cheered him, saying, "Patience, my Father. Thou shalt see yet!"

But the hermit replied, "My son, I repent me that I have not been patient under affliction. Moreover, I have set thee an ill example, in that I have murmured at that which God—Who knowest best—ordained for me."

And when the boy oftentimes repeated, "Thou shalt yet see," the hermit answered, "If GOD will. When GOD will. As GOD will."

And when he said the prayers for the Hours, he no longer added what he had added beforetime, but evermore repeated, "If THOU wilt. When THOU wilt. As THOU wilt!"

And so the winter passed; and when the snow lay on the ground the boy and the hermit talked of the garden; and the boy no longer contradicted the old man, though he spoke continually of the hearts-ease, and the everlasting flowers, and the palm. For he said, "When Spring comes I may be able to get these plants, and fit the garden to his vision."

And at length the Spring came. And with it rose the Trinity Flower. And when the leaves unfolded, they were three, as the hermit had said. Then the boy was wild with joy and with impatience. And when the sun shone for two days together, he would kneel by the flower, and say, "I pray thee, Lord, send showers, that it may wax apace." And when it rained, he said, "I pray Thee, send sunshine, that it may blossom speedily." For he knew not what to ask. And he danced about the hermit, and cried, "Soon shalt thou see."

But the hermit trembled, and said, "Not as I will, but as THOU wilt!"

And so the bud formed. And at length one evening, before he went down to the hamlet, the boy came to the hermit and said, "The bud is almost breaking, my Father. To-morrow thou shalt see."

Then the hermit moved his hands till he laid them on the boy's head, and he said, "The Lord repay thee sevenfold for all thou hast done for me, dear child. And now I pray thee, my Son, give me thy pardon for all in which I have sinned against thee by word or deed, for indeed my thoughts of thee have ever been tender." And when the boy wept, the hermit still pressed him, till he said that he forgave him. And as they unwillingly parted, the hermit said, "I pray thee, dear Son, to remember that, though late, I conformed myself to the will of GOD."

Saying which, the hermit went into his cell, and the boy returned to the village.

But so great was his anxiety, that he could not rest ; and he returned to the garden ere it was light, and sat by the flower till the dawn. And with the first dim light he saw that the Trinity Flower was in bloom. And as the hermit had said, it was white, and stained with crimson as with blood.

Then the boy shed tears of joy, and he plucked the flower and ran into the hermit's cell, where the hermit lay very still upon his couch. And the boy said, "I will not disturb him. When he wakes he will find the flower." And he went out and sat down outside the cell and waited. And being weary as he waited, he fell asleep.

Now before sunrise, whilst it was yet early, he was awakened by the voice of the hermit crying, "My Son, my dear Son !" and he jumped up, saying, "My Father !"

But as he spoke the hermit passed him. And as he passed he turned, and the boy saw that his eyes were open. And the hermit fixed them long and tenderly on him.

Then the boy cried, "Ah, tell me, my Father, dost thou see ?"

And he answered, "*I see now !*" and so he passed on down the walk.

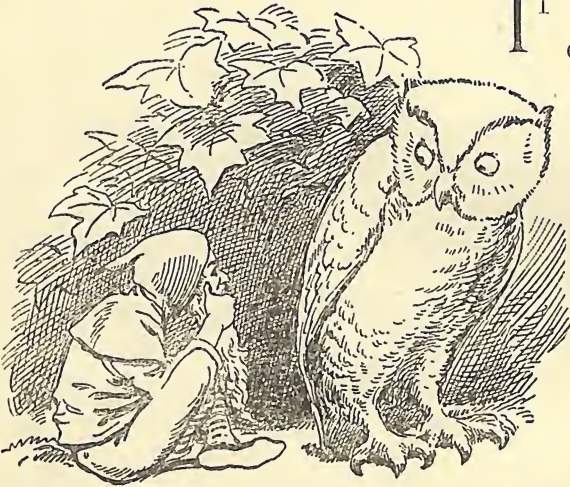
And as he went through the garden, in the still dawn, the boy trembled, for the hermit's footsteps gave no sound. And he passed beyond the rosemary bush, and came not again.

And when the day wore on, and the hermit did not return, the boy went into his cell.

Without, the sunshine dried the dew from paths on which the hermit's feet had left no prints, and cherished the spring flowers bursting into bloom. But within, the hermit's dead body lay stretched upon his pallet, and the Trinity Flower was in his hand.

THE KYRKEGRIM TURNED PREACHER

A LEGEND



IT is said that in Norway every church has its own Niss, or Brownie.

They are of the same race as the Good People, who haunt farm-houses, and do the maid's work for a pot of cream. They are the size of a year-old child, but their faces are the faces of aged men. Their common dress is

of gray home-spun, with red peaked caps; but on Michaelmas Day they wear round hats.

The Church Niss is called Kyrkegrim. His duty is to keep the church clean, and to scatter the marsh-marigold flowers on the floor before service. He also keeps order in the congregation, pinches those who fall asleep, cuffs irreverent boys, and hustles mothers with crying children out of church as quickly and decorously as possible.

But his business is not with church-brawlers alone.

When the last snow avalanche has slipped from the high-pitched roof, and the gentian is bluer than the sky, and Baldur's Eyebrow blossoms in the hot spring sun, pious folk are wont to come to church some time before service, and to bring their spades, and rakes, and

watering-pots with them, to tend the graves of the dead. The Kyrkegrim sits on the Lych Gate and overlooks them.

At those who do not lay by their tools in good time he throws pebbles, crying to each, "*Skynde dig!*" (Make haste!), and so drives them in. And when the bells begin, should any man fail to bow to the church as the custom is, the Kyrkegrim snatches his hat from behind, and he sees it no more.

Nothing displeases the Kyrkegrim more than when people fall asleep during the sermon. This will be seen in the following story.

Once upon a time there was a certain country church, which was served by a very mild and excellent priest, and haunted by a most active Kyrkegrim.

Not a speck of dust was to be seen from the altar to the porch, and the behavior of the congregation was beyond reproach.

But there was one fat farmer who slept during the sermon, and do what the Kyrkegrim would, he could not keep him awake. Again and again did he pinch him, nudge him, or let in a cold draught of wind upon his neck. The fat farmer shook himself, pulled up his neck-kerchief, and dozed off again.

"Doubtless the fault is in my sermons," said the priest, when the Kyrkegrim complained to him. For he was humble-minded.

But the Kyrkegrim knew that this was not the case, for there was no better preacher in all the district.

And yet when he overheard the farmer's sharp-tongued little wife speak of this and that in the discourse, he began to think that it might be so. No doubt the preacher spoke somewhat fast or slow, a little too loud or too soft. And he was not "stirring" enough, said the farmer's wife; a failing which no one had ever laid at her door.

"His soul is in my charge," sighed the good priest, "and I cannot even make him hear what I have got to say. A heavy reckoning will be demanded of me!"

"The sermons are in fault, beyond a doubt," the Kyrkegrim said. "The farmer's wife is quite right. She's a sensible woman, and can use a mop as well as myself."

"Hoot, hoot!" cried the church owl, pushing his head out of the ivy-bush. "And shall she be Kyrkegrim when thou art turned preacher, and the preacher sits on the judgment seat? Not so, little Niss! Dust thou the pulpit, and leave the parson to preach, and let the Maker of souls reckon with them."

"If the preacher cannot keep the people awake, it is time that another took his place," said the Kyrkegrim.

"He is not bound to find ears as well as arguments," retorted the owl, and he drew back into his ivy bush.

But the Kyrkegrim settled his red cap firmly on his head, and betook himself to the priest, whose meekness (as is apt to be the case) encouraged the opposite qualities in those with whom he had to do.

"The farmer must be roused somehow," said he. "It is a disgrace to us all, and what, in all the hundreds of years I have been Kyrkegrim, never befell me before. It will be well if next Sunday you preach a stirring sermon on some very important subject."

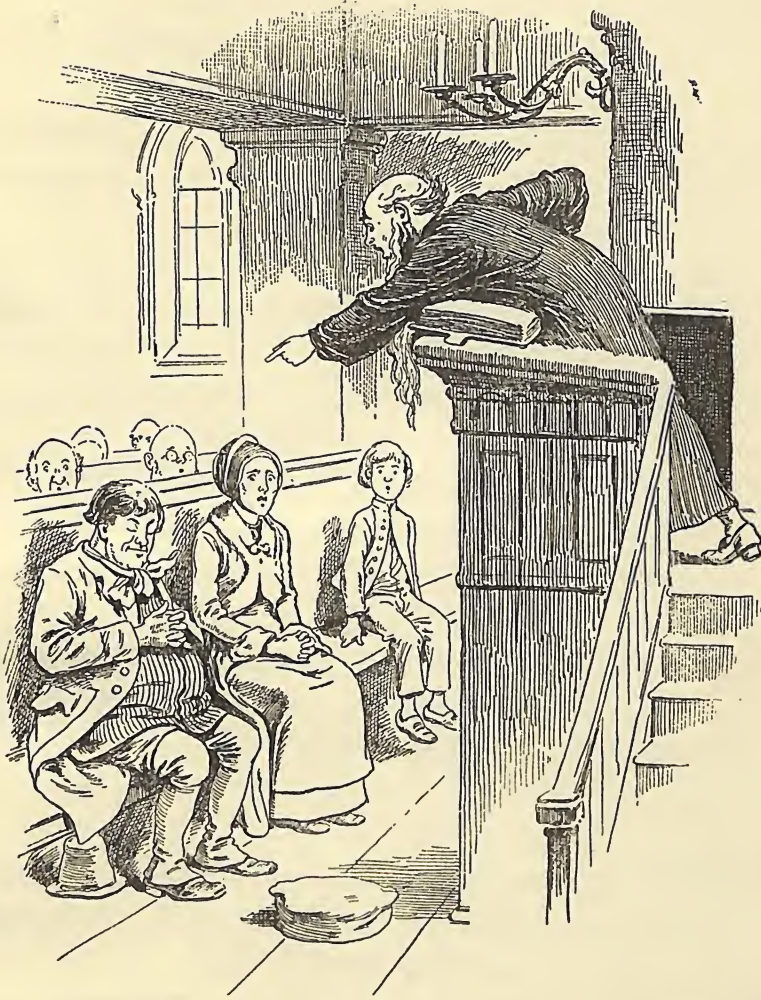
So the preacher preached on Sin—fair of flower, and bitter of fruit!—and as he preached his own cheeks grew pale for other men's perils, and the Kyrkegrim trembled as he sat listening in the porch, though he had no soul to lose.

"Was that stirring enough?" he asked, twitching the sleeve of the farmer's wife as she flounced out after service.

"Splendid!" said she, "and must have hit some folk pretty hard too."

"It kept your husband awake this time, I should think," said the Kyrkegrim.

"Heighy teighy!" cried the farmer's wife. "I'd have you to know my good man is as decent a body as any in the parish, if he



does take a nap on Sundays ! He is no sinner if he is no saint, thank Heaven, and the parson knows better than to preach at him."

"Next Sunday," said the Kyrkegrim to the priest, "preach about something which concerns everyone ; respectable people as well as others."

So the preacher preached of Death—whom tears cannot move, nor

riches bribe, nor power defy. The uncertain interruption and the only certain end of all life's labors ! And as he preached, the women sitting in their seats wept for the dead whose graves they had been tending, and down the aged cheeks of the Kyrkegrim there stole tears of pity for poor men, whose love and labor are cut short so soon.

But the farmer slept as before.

"Do you not expect to die ?" asked the Kyrkegrim.

"Surely," said the farmer, "we must all die some day, and one does not need a preacher to tell him that. But it was a funeral sermon, my wife thinks. There has been bereavement in the miller's family."

"Men are a strange race," thought the Kyrkegrim ; but he went to the priest and said—"The farmer is not afraid of death. You must find some subject of which men really stand in awe."

So when Sunday came round again, the preacher preached of Judgment—that dread Avenger who dogs the footsteps of trespass, even now ! That awful harvest of whirlwind and corruption which they must reap who sow to the wind and to the flesh ! Lightly regarded, but biding its time, till a man's forgotten follies find him out at last.

But the farmer slept on. He did not wake when the preacher spoke of judgment to come, the reckoning that cannot be shunned, the trump of the Archangel, and the Day of Doom.

"On Michaelmas Day I shall preach myself," said the Kyrkegrim, "and if I cannot rouse him, I shall give up my charge here."

This troubled the poor priest, for so good a Kyrkegrim was not likely to be found again.

Nevertheless he consented, for he was very meek, and when Michaelmas Day came the Kyrkegrim pulled a preacher's gown over his homespun coat, and laid his round hat on the desk by the iron-clamped Bible, and began his sermon.

"I shall give no text," said he, "but when I have said what seems good to me, it is for those who hear to see if the Scriptures bear me out."

This was an uncommon beginning, and most good folk pricked their ears, the farmer among them, for novelty is agreeable in church as elsewhere.

"I speak," said the Kyrkegrim, "of that which is the last result of sin, the worst of deaths, and the beginning of judgment—hardness of heart."

The farmer looked a little uncomfortable, and the Kyrkegrim went bravely on.

"Let us seek examples in Scripture. We will speak of Pharaoh."

But when the Kyrkegrim spoke of Pharaoh the farmer was at ease again. And by-and-bye a film stole gently before his eyes, and he nodded in his seat.

This made the Kyrkegrim very angry, for he did not wish to give up his place, and yet a Niss may not break his word.

"Let us look at the punishment of Pharaoh," he cried. But the farmer's eyes were still closed, and the Kyrkegrim became agitated, and turned the leaves of the iron-clamped Bible before him.

"We will speak of the plagues," said he. "The plague of blood, the plague of frogs, the plague of lice, the plague of flies——"

At this moment the farmer snored.

For a brief instant, anger and dismay kept the Kyrkegrim silent. Then shutting the iron clamps he pushed the Book on one side, and scrambling on to a stool, stretched his little body well over the desk, and said, "But these flies were as nothing to the fly that is coming in the turnip-crop!"

The words were hardly out of his mouth when the farmer sat suddenly upright, and half rising from his place, cried anxiously, "Eh, what sir? What does he say, wife? A new fly among the turnips."

“ Ah, soul of clay ! ” yelled the indignant Kyrkegrim, as he hurled his round hat at the gaping farmer. “ Is it indeed for such as thee that Eternal Life is kept in store ? ”

And drawing the preacher’s gown over his head, he left it in the pulpit, and scrambling down the steps hastened out of church.

* * * * *

As he had been successful in rousing the sleepy farmer the Kyrkegrim did not abandon his duties ; but it is said that thenceforward he kept to them alone, and left heavier responsibilities in higher hands.





LADDERS TO HEAVEN*

A LEGEND

THERE was a certain valley in which the grass was very green, for it was watered by a stream which never failed; and once upon a time certain pious men withdrew from the wide world and from their separate homes, and made a home in common, and a little world for themselves, in the valley where the grass was green.

The world outside, in those days, was very rough and full of wars; but the little world in the Green Valley was quiet and full of peace.

* "Ladders to Heaven" was an old name for Lilies of the Valley.

And most of these men who had taken each other for brothers, and had made one home there, were happy, and being good deserved to be so. And some of them were good with the ignorant innocence of children, and there were others who had washed their robes and made them white in the Blood of the Lamb.

Brother Benedict was so named, because where he came blessings followed. This was said of him, from a child, when the babies stopped crying if he ran up to them, and when on the darkest days old women could see sunbeams playing in his hair. He had always been fond of flowers, and as there were not many things in the Brotherhood of the Green Valley on which a man could full-spend his energies, when prayers were said, and duties done, Brother Benedict spent the balance of his upon the garden. And he grew herbs for healing, and plants that were good for food, and flowers that were only pleasant to the eyes; and where he sowed he reaped, and what he planted prospered, as if blessings followed him.

In time the fame of his flowers spread beyond the valley, and people from the world outside sent to beg plants and seeds of him, and sent him others in return. And he kept a roll of the plants that he possessed, and the list grew longer with every Autumn and every Spring; so that the garden of the monastery became filled with rare and curious things, in which Brother Benedict took great pride.

The day came when he thought that he took too much pride. For he said, "The cares of the garden are, after all, cares of this world, and I have set my affections upon things of the earth." And at last it so troubled him that he obtained leave to make a pilgrimage to the cell of an old hermit, whose wisdom was much esteemed, and to him he told his fears.

But when Brother Benedict had ended his tale, the old man said, "Go in peace. What a man labors for he must love, if he be made in the image of his Maker; for He rejoices in the works of His hands."

So Brother Benedict returned, and his conscience was at ease till the Autumn, when a certain abbot, who spent much care and pains upon his garden, was on a journey, and rested at the Monastery of the Green Valley. And it appeared that he had more things in his garden than Brother Benedict, for the abbey was very rich, and he had collected far and near. And Brother Benedict was jealous for the garden of the monastery, and then he was wroth with himself for his jealousy ; and when the abbot had gone he obtained leave, and made a pilgrimage to the cell of the hermit and told him all. And the old man, looking at him, loved him, and he said :

“ My son, a man may bind his soul with fine-drawn strands till it is either entangled in a web or breaks all bonds. Gird thyself with one strong line, and let little things go by.”

And Benedict said, “ With which line ? ”

And the hermit answered, “ What said Augustine ? ‘ Love, and do what thou wilt.’ If therefore thy labors and thy pride be for others and not for thyself, have no fear. He who lives for God and for his neighbors may forget his soul in safety, and shall find it hereafter ; for for such a spirit—of the toils and pains and pleasures of this life—grace shall alike build Ladders unto Heaven.”

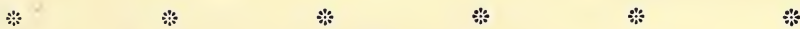
Then Benedict bowed his head, and departed ; and when he reached home he found a messenger who had ridden for many days, and who brought him a bundle of roots, and a written message, which ran thus :

“ These roots, though common with us, are unknown where thou dwellest. It is a lily, as white and as fragrant as the Lily of the Annunciation, but much smaller. Beautiful as it is, it is hardy, and if planted in a damp spot and left strictly undisturbed it will spread and flourish like a weed. It hath a rare and delicate perfume, and having white bells on many footstalks up the stem, one above the other, as the angels stood in Jacob’s dream, the common children call it Ladders to Heaven.”

And when Brother Benedict read the first part of the letter he laughed hastily, and said, "The abbot hath no such lily." But when he had finished it, he said, "God rid my soul of self-seeking! The common children shall have them, and not I."

And, seizing the plants and a spade, he ran beyond the bounds of the monastery, and down into a little copse where the earth was kept damp by the waters of the stream which never failed. And there he planted the roots, and as he turned to go away he said, "The blessing of our Maker rest on thee! And give joy of thy loveliness, and pleasure of thy perfume, to others when I am gone. And let him who enjoys remember the soul of him who planted thee."

And he covered his face with his hands, and went back to the monastery. And he did not enter the new plant upon his roll, for he had no such lily in his garden.



Brother Benedict's soul had long departed, when in times of turbulence and change, the monastery was destroyed, and between fire and plunder and reckless destruction everything perished, and even the garden was laid waste. But no one touched the Lilies of the Valley in the copse below, for they were so common that they were looked upon as weeds. And though nothing remained of the brotherhood but old tales, these lingered, and were handed on; and when the children played with the lilies and bickered over them, crying, "My ladder has twelve white angels and yours has only eight," they would often call them Brother Benedict's flowers, adding, "but the real right name of them is Ladders to Heaven."

And after a time a new race came into the Green Valley and filled it; and the stream which never failed turned many wheels, and trades were brisk, and they were what are called black trades. And men made money soon, and spent it soon, and died soon; and in the time

between each lived for himself, and had little reverence for those who should come after. And at first they were too busy to care for what is only beautiful, but after a time they built smart houses, and made gardens, and went down into the copse and tore up clumps of Brother Benedict's flowers, and planted them in exposed rockeries, and in pots in dry hot parlors, where they died, and then the good folk went back for more; and no one reckoned if he was taking more than his fair share, or studied the culture of what he took away, or took the pains to cover the roots of those he left behind, and in three years there was not left a Ladder to Heaven in all the Green Valley.

The Green Valley had long been called the Black Valley, when those who labored and grew rich in it awoke—as man must sooner or later awake—to the needs of the spirit above the flesh. They were a race famed for music, and they became more so. The love of beauty also grew, and was cultivated, and in time there were finer flowers blossoming in that smoky air than under many brighter skies. And with the earnings of their grimy trades they built a fine church, and adorned it more richly than the old church of the monastery, that had been destroyed.

The parson who served this church and this people was as well-beloved by them as Brother Benedict had been in his day, and it was in striving to link their minds with sympathies of the past as well as hopes of the future, that one day he told them the legend of the Ladders to Heaven. A few days afterwards he was wandering near the stream, when he saw two or three lads with grimy faces busily at work in the wood through which the stream ran. At first, when he came suddenly on them, they looked shyly at one another, and at last one stood up and spoke.

“It's a few lily roots, sir, we got in the market, and we're planting them; and two and three of us have set ourselves to watch that they

are not shifted till they've settled. Maybe we shall none of us see them fair wild here again, any more than Brother Benedict did. For black trades are short-lived trades, and there's none of us will be as old as he. But maybe we can take a pride too in thinking that they'll blow for other folk and other folk's children when we are gone."

* * * * *

Once more the fastidious * flowers spread, and became common in the valley, and were guarded with jealous care; and the memory of Brother Benedict lingered by the stream, and was doubly blessed.

For if he is blessed whose love and wisdom add to the world's worth, and make life richer in pleasant things, thrice blessed is he whose unselfish example shall be culture to the ignorant or the thoughtless, and set Ladders to Heaven for the feet of those who follow him!

* It is well known that Lilies of the Valley are flowers which resent disturbance, though they are perfectly hardy and vigorous if left in peace.



THREE CHRISTMAS TREES

THIS is a story of Three Christmas Trees. The first was a real one, but the child we are to speak of did not see it. He saw the other two, but they were not real; they only existed in his fancy. The plot of the story is very simple; and, as it has been described so early, it is easy for those who think it stupid to lay the book down in good time.

Probably every child who reads this has seen one Christmas-tree or more; but in the small town of a distant colony with which we have to do, this could not at one time have been said. Christmas-trees were then by no means so universal as they now are, and in this little colonial town, they were unknown. Unknown that is, till the Governor's wife gave her great children's party. At which point we will begin the story.

The Governor had given a great many parties in his time. He had entertained big wigs and little wigs, the passing military, and the local grandees. Everybody who had the remotest claim to attention had been attended to: the ladies had had their full share of balls and pleasure parties: only one class of the population had any complaint to prefer against his hospitality; but the class was a large one—it was the children. However, he was a bachelor, and knew little or nothing about little boys and girls: let us pity him rather than blame him. At last he took to himself a wife; and among the many advantages of this important step, was a due recognition of the claims of these young citizens. It was towards happy Christmas-tide, that

“the Governor’s amiable and admired lady” (as she was styled in the local newspaper) sent out notes for her first children’s party. At the top of the notepaper was a very red robin, who carried a blue Christmas greeting in his mouth, and at the bottom—written with A. D. C.’s best flourish—were the magic words, *A Christmas Tree*. In spite of the flourishes—partly perhaps, because of them—the A. D. C.’s handwriting, though handsome, was rather illegible. But for all this, most of the children invited contrived to read these words and those who could not do so were not slow to learn the news by hearsay.

There was to be a Christmas Tree! It would be like a birthday party, with this above ordinary birthdays, that there were to be presents for every one.

One of the children invited lived in a little white house, with a spruce fir-tree before the door. The spruce fir did this good service to the little house, that it helped people to find their way to it; and it was by no means easy for a stranger to find his way to any given house in this little town, especially if the house were small and white, and stood in one of the back streets. For most of the houses were small, and most of them were painted white, and the back streets ran parallel with each other, and had no names, and were all so much alike that it was very confusing. For instance, if you had asked the way to Mr. So-and-So’s, it is very probable that some friend would have directed you as follows: “Go straight forward and take the first turning to the left, and you will find that there are four streets, which run at right angles to the one you are in, and parallel with each other. Each of them has got a big pine in it—one of the old forest trees. Take the last street but one, and the fifth white house you come to is Mr. So-and-so’s. He has green blinds and a colored servant.” You would not always have got such clear directions as these, but with them you would probably have found the house at last, partly by

accident, partly by the blinds and colored servant. Some of the neighbors affirmed that the little white house had a name; that all houses and streets had names, only they were traditional and not recorded anywhere; that very few people knew them, and nobody made any use of them. The name of the little white house was said to be Trafalgar Villa, which seemed so inappropriate to the modest peaceful little home, that the man who lived in it tried to find out why it had been so called. He thought that his predecessor must have been in the navy, until he found that he had been the owner of what is called a "dry-goods store," which seems to mean a shop where things are sold which are not good to eat or drink—such as drapery.

At last somebody said, that as there was a public-house called the "Duke of Wellington" at the corner of the street, there probably had been a nearer one called "The Nelson" which been burnt down, and that the man who built "The Nelson" had built the house with the spruce fir before it, and that so the name had arisen. An explanation which was just so far probable, that public-houses and fires were of frequent occurrence in those parts.

But this has nothing to do with the story. Only we must say, as we said before, and as we should have said had we been living there then, the child we speak of lived in the little white house with one spruce fir just in front of it.

Of all the children who looked forward to the Christmas-tree, he looked forward to it the most intensely. He was an imaginative child, of a simple, happy nature, easy to please. His father was an Englishman, and in the long winter evenings he would tell the child tales of the old country, to which his mother would listen also. Perhaps the parents enjoyed these stories the most. To the boy they were new, and consequently delightful, but to the parents they were old; and as regards some stories, that is better still.

"What kind of a bird is this on my letter?" asked the boy on the

day which brought the Governor's lady's note of invitation. "And oh! what is a Christmas-tree?"

"The bird is an English robin," said the father. "It is quite another bird to that which is called a robin here: it is smaller and rounder, and has a redder breast and bright dark eyes, and lives and sings at home through the winter. A Christmas-tree is a fir-tree—just such a one as that outside the door—brought into the house, and covered with lights and presents. Picture to yourself our fir-tree lighted up with tapers on all the branches, with dolls, and trumpets, and bon-bons, and drums, and toys of all kinds hanging from it like fir-cones, and on the tip-top shoot a figure of a Christmas Angel in white, with a star upon its head."

"Fancy!" said the boy.

And fancy he did. Every day he looked at the spruce fir, and tried to imagine it laden with presents, and brilliant with tapers, and thought how wonderful must be that "old country"—*Home*, as it was called, even by those who had never seen it—where the robins were so very red, and where at Christmas the fir-trees were hung with toys instead of cones.

It was certainly a pity that, two days before the party, an original idea on the subject of snowmen struck one of the children who used to play together, with their sleds and snow-shoes, in the back streets. The idea was this: That instead of having a common-place snowman whose legs were obliged to be mere stumps, for fear he should be top-heavy, and who could not walk, even with them; who, in fact could do nothing but stand at the corner of the street, holding his impotent stick, and staring with his pebble eyes, till he was broken to pieces or ignominiously carried away by a thaw,—that, instead of this, they should have a real, live snowman, who should walk on competent legs, to the astonishment, and (happy thought!) perhaps to the alarm of the passers-by. This delightful novelty was to be

accomplished by covering one of the boys of the party with snow till he looked as like a real snowman as circumstances would admit. At first everybody wanted to be the snowman, but, when it came to the point, it was found to be so much duller to stand still and be covered up than to run about and work, that no one was willing to act the part. At last it was undertaken by the little boy from the Fir House. He was somewhat small, but then he was so good-natured he would always do as he was asked. So he stood manfully still, with his arms over a walking-stick upon his breast, whilst the others heaped the snow upon him. The plan was not so successful as they had hoped. The snow would not stick anywhere but on his shoulders, and when it got into his neck he cried with the cold; but they were so anxious to carry out their project, that they begged him to bear it "just a little longer;" and the urchin who had devised the original idea wiped the child's eyes with his handkerchief, and (with that hopefulness which is so easy over other people's matters) "dared say that when all the snow was on, he wouldn't feel it." However, he did feel it, and that so severely that the children were obliged to give up the game, and, taking the stick out his stiff little arms to lead him home.

It appears that it is with snowmen as with some other men in conspicuous positions. It is easier to find fault with them than to fill their place.

The end of this was a feverish cold, and, when the day of the party came, the ex-snowman was still in bed. It is due to the other children to say that they felt the disappointment as keenly as he did, and that it greatly damped the pleasure of the party for them to think that they had prevented his sharing in the treat. The most penitent of all was the deviser of the original idea. He had generously offered to stay at home with the little patient, which was as generously refused; but the next evening he was allowed to come and sit on the bed, and describe it all for the amusement of his friend. He was a

quaint boy, this urchin, with a face as broad as an American-Indian's, eyes as bright as a squirrel's, and all the mischief in life lurking about him, till you could see roguishness in the very folds of his hooded Indian winter coat of blue and scarlet. In his hand he brought the sick child's present; a dray with two white horses, and little barrels that took off and on, and a driver, with wooden joints, a cloth coat, and everything, in fact, that was suitable to the driver of a brewer's dray, except that he had boots and earrings, and that his hair was painted in braids like a lady's, which is clearly the fault of the doll manufacturers, who will persist in making them all of the weaker sex.

"And what was the Christmas-tree like?" asked the invalid.

"Exactly like the fir outside your door," was the reply. "Just about that size, and planted in a pot covered with red cloth. It was kept in another room till after tea, and then when the door was opened it was like a street fire in the town at night—such a blaze of light—Candles everywhere! And on all the branches the most beautiful presents. I got a drum and a penwiper."

"Was there an angel?" the child asked.

"Oh, yes!" the boy answered. "It was on the tip-top branch, and it was given to me, and I brought it for you, if you would like it; for, you know, I am so very, very sorry I thought of a snowman and made you ill, and I do love you, and beg you to forgive me."

And the roguish face stooped over the pillow to be kissed; and out of a pocket in the hooded coat came forth the Christmas Angel. In the face it bore a strong family likeness to the drayman, but its feet were hidden in folds of snowy muslin, and on its head glittered a tinsel star.

"How lovely!" said the child. "Father told me about this. I like it best of all. And it is very kind of you, for it is not your fault that I caught cold. I should have liked it if we could have done it,

but I think to enjoy being a snowman, one should be snow all through."

They had tea together, and then the invalid was tucked up for the night. The dray was put away in the cupboard, but he took the angel to bed with him.

And so ended the first of the Three Christmas Trees.

* * * * *

Except for a warm glow from the wood fire in the stove, the room was dark ; but about midnight it seemed to the child a sudden blaze of light filled the chamber. At the same moment the window curtains were drawn aside, and he saw that the spruce fir had come close up to the panes and was peeping in. Ah ! how beautiful it looked ! It had become a Christmas-tree. Lighted tapers shone from every familiar branch, toys of the most fascinating appearance hung like fruit, and on the tip-top shoot there stood the Christmas Angel. He tried to count the candles, but somehow it was impossible. When he looked at them they seemed to change places—to move—to become like the angel, and then to be candles again, whilst the flames nodded to each other and repeated the blue greeting of the robin, "A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year !" Then he tried to distinguish the presents, but, beautiful as the toys looked, he could not exactly discover what any of them were, or choose which he would like best. Only the Angel he could see clearly—so clearly ! It was more beautiful than the doll under his pillow ; it had a lovely face like his own mother's, he thought, and on its head gleamed a star far brighter than tinsel. Its white robes waved with the flames of the tapers, and it stretched its arms towards him with a smile.

"I am to go and choose my present," thought the child ; and he called "Mother ! Mother dear ! please open the window."

But his mother did not answer. So he thought he must get up himself, and with an effort, he struggled out of bed.

But when he was on his feet, everything seemed changed ! Only the fire-light shone upon the walls, and the curtains were once more firmly closed before the window. It had been a dream, but so vivid that in his feverish state he still thought it must be true, and dragged the curtains back to let in the glorious sight again. The fire-light shone upon a thick coating of frost upon the panes, but no further could he see, so with all his strength he pushed the window open and leaned out into the night.

The spruce fir stood in its old place ; but it looked very beautiful in its Christmas dress. Beneath it lay a carpet of pure white. The snow was clustered in exquisite shapes upon its plummy branches ; wrapping the tree top with its little cross shoots, as a white robe might wrap a figure with outstretched arms.

There were no tapers to be seen, but northern lights shot up into the dark blue sky, and just over the fir-tree shone a bright, bright star.

“ Jupiter looks well to-night,” said the old Professor in the town observatory, as he fixed his telescope ; but to the child it seemed as the star of the Christmas Angel.

His mother had really heard him call, and now came and put him back to bed again. And so ended the second of the Three Christmas-Trees.

* * * * *

It was enough to have killed him, all his friends said ; but it did not. He lived to be a man, and—what is rarer—to keep the faith, the simplicity, the tender-heartedness, the vivid fancy of childhood. He lived to see many Christmas-trees “ at home ” in that old country where the robins are redbreasts, and sing in winter. There a heart as good and gentle as his own became one with his ; and once he brought his young wife across the sea to visit the place where he was born. They stood near the little white house, and he told her the story of the Christmas-trees.

"This was when I was a child," he added.

"But that you are still," said she; and she plucked a bit of the fir-tree and kissed it, and carried it away.

He lived to tell the story to his grand-children; but he never was able to decide which of the two was the more beautiful—the Christmas-Tree of his dream, or the Spruce Fir as it stood in the loneliness of that winter night.

This is told, not that it has anything to do with any of the Three Christmas-Trees, but to show that the story is a happy one, as is right and proper; that the hero lived, and married, and had children, and was as prosperous as good people, in books, should always be.

Of course he died at last. The best and happiest of men must die; and it is only because some stories stop short in their history, that every hero is not duly buried before we lay down the book.

When death came for our hero he was an old man. The beloved wife, some of his children, and many of his friends had died before him, and of those whom he had loved there were fewer to leave than to rejoin. He had had a short illness, with little pain, and was now lying on his deathbed in one of the big towns in the North of England. His youngest son, a clergyman, was with him, and one or two others of his children, and by the fire sat the doctor.

The doctor had been sitting by the patient, but now that he could do no more for him he had moved to the fire; and they had taken the ghastly, half-emptied medicine bottles from the table by the bedside, and had spread it with a fair linen cloth, and had set out the silver vessels of the Supper of the Lord.

The old man had been "wandering" somewhat during the day. He had talked much of going home to the old country, and with the wide range of dying thoughts he had seemed to mingle memories of childhood with his hopes of Paradise. At intervals he was clear and collected—one of those moments had been chosen for his

last sacrament—and he had fallen asleep with the blessing in his ears.

He slept so long and so peacefully that the son almost began to hope that there might be a change, and looked towards the doctor, who still sat by the fire with his right leg crossed over his left. The doctor's eyes were also on the bed, but at that moment he drew out his watch and looked at it with an air of professional conviction, which said, "It's only a question of time." Then he crossed his left leg over his right, and turned to the fire again. Before the right leg should be tired, all would be over. The son saw it as clearly as if it had been spoken, and he too turned away and sighed.

As they sat, the bells of a church in the town began to chime for midnight service, for it was Christmas Eve, but they did not wake the dying man. He slept on and on

The doctor dozed. The son read in the Prayer Book on the table, and one of his sisters read with him. Another, from grief and weariness, slept with her head upon his shoulder. Except for a warm glow from the fire, the room was dark. Suddenly the old man sat up in bed, and, in a strong voice, cried with inexpressible enthusiasm,

"How beautiful!"

The son held back his sisters, and asked quietly.

"What, my dear Father?"

"The Christmas Tree!" he said in a low, eager voice. "Draw back the curtains."

They were drawn back; but nothing could be seen, and still the old man gazed as if in ecstasy.

"Light!" he murmured. "The Angel! the Star!"

Again there was silence; and then he stretched forth his hand, and cried passionately,

"The Angel is beckoning to me! Mother! Mother dear! Please open the window."

The sash was thrown open, and all eyes turned involuntarily where those of the dying man were gazing. There was no Christmas-tree—no tree at all. But over the house-tops the morning star looked pure and pale in the dawn of Christmas Day. For the night was past, and above the distant hum of the streets the clear voices of some waits made the words of an old carol heard—words dearer for their association than their poetry—

“While shepherds watched their flocks by night,
All seated on the ground,
The Angel of the Lord came down,
And glory shone around.”

When the window was opened, the soul passed; and when they looked back to the bed the old man had lain down again, and like a child, was smiling in his sleep—his last sleep.

And this was the Third Christmas-Tree.



THREE LITTLE NEST BIRDS

WE meant to be very kind,
But if we find

Another soft, gray-green, moss-coated, feather-lined nest in a
hedge,

We have taken a pledge—

Susan, Jemmy, and I—with remorseful tears, at this very minute,
That if there are eggs or little birds in it—

Robin or wren, thrush, chaffinch or linnet—

We'll leave them there

To their mother's care.

There were three of us—Kate, and Susan, and Jem—

And three of them—

I don't know *their* names for they couldn't speak,

Except with a little imperative squeak,

Exactly like Poll,

Susan's squeaking doll;

But squeaking dolls will lie on the shelves

For years and never squeak of themselves:

The reason we like little birds so much better than toys

Is because they are *really* alive, and know how to make a noise.

Our mother was busy making a pie,

And theirs, we think was up in the sky;

But for all Susan, Jemmy, or I can tell,

She may have been getting their dinner as well.

They were left to themselves (and so were we)
In a nest in the hedge by the willow tree :
And when we caught sight of three little fluff-tufted, hazel-eyed,
open-mouthed, pink-throated heads, we all shouted for glee.

The way we really did wrong was this :

We took them for mother to kiss,

And she told us to put them back,

Whilst out on the willow *their* mother was crying "Alack!"

We really heard

Both what Mother told us to do, and the voice of the mother bird.

But we three—that is Susan and I and Jem—

Thought we knew better than either of them :

And in spite of our mother's command and the poor bird's cry,

We determined to bring up her three nestlings ourselves on the sly.

We each took one,

It did seem such excellent fun !

Susan fed hers on milk and bread,

Jem got wriggling worms for his instead,

I gave mine meat,

For, you know, I thought, "Poor darling pet !

Why shouldn't it have roast beef to eat?"

But, O dear ! O dear ! O dear ! How we cried

When, in spite of milk and bread and worms and roast beef, the
little birds died !

It's a terrible thing to have heart ache,

I thought mine would break

As I heard the mother bird's moan.

And looked at the gray-green, moss-coated, feather-lined nest she
had taken such pains to make,
And her three little children dead, as cold as stone.

Mother said and it's sadly true,
"There are some wrong things one can never undo."
And nothing that we could do or say
Would bring life back to the birds that day
The bitterest tears that we could weep
Wouldn't wake them out of their stiff, cold sleep.

But then,
We—Susan and Jem and I—mean never to be so selfish and
wilful and cruel again.
And we three have buried those other three
In a soft, green, moss-covered, flower-lined grave, at the foot of
the willow tree,
And all the leaves which its branches shed
We think are tears because they are dead.



BIG SMITH

ARE you a Giant, great big man, or is your real name Smith? Nurse says you've got a hammer that you hit bad children with. I'm good today, and so I've come to see if it is true That you can turn a red-hot rod into a horse's shoe.

Why do you make the horses' shoes of iron instead of leather? Is it because they are allowed to go out in bad weather? If horses should be shod with iron, Big Smith, will you shoe mine? For now I may not take him out, excepting when it's fine.

Although he's not a real live horse, I'm
very fond of him.

His harness won't take off and on, but
still it's new and trim.

His tail is hair, he has
four legs, but neither
hoofs nor heels,

I think he'd seem more
like a horse without
these yellow wheels.

They say that Dapple-
gray's not yours, but
don't you wish he
were?

My horse's coat is only
paint, but his is soft
gray hair;



His face is big and kind, like yours, his forelock white as snow—
Shan't you be sorry when you've done his shoes and he must go?

I do so wish, Big Smith, that I might come and live with you,
To rake the fire, to heat the rods, to hammer two and two
To be so black, and not to have to wash unless I choose;
To pat the dear old horses, and to mend their poor old shoes.

When all the world is dark at night, you work among the stars,
A shining shower of fireworks, beat out of red-hot bars.
I've seen you beat, I've heard you sing, when I was going to bed;
And now your face and arms looked black, and now were glowing red.

The more you work, the more you sing, the more the bellows roar.
The falling stars, the flying sparks, stream shining more and more.
You hit so hard, you look so hot, and yet you never tire;
It must be very nice to be allowed to play with fire.

I long to beat and sing and shine, as you do, but instead
I put away my horse, and Nurse puts me away to bed.
I wonder if you go to bed; I often think I'll keep
Awake and see, but, though I try, I always fall asleep.

I know it's very silly, but I sometimes am afraid
Of being in the dark alone, especially in bed.
But when I see your forge-light come and go upon the wall,
And hear you through the window, I am not afraid at all.

I often hear a trotting horse, I sometimes hear it stop;
I hold my breath—you stay your song—it's at the blacksmith's shop.
Before it goes, I'm apt to fall asleep, Big Smith, it's true;
But then I dream of hammering that horse's shoes with you!

MR. PUSSY CAT'S WEDDING DAY.

My wife and I, you see, we wear
A pleased and yet a thoughtful air.
We must not frown, we must not laugh,
We're sitting for our photograph.



Oh, life will be a lovely dream
Among the dairy curds and cream!
We both shall grow so fine and fat,
Mr. and Mrs. Pussy Cat.

AN IDLE DAY.

"If I could only have one whole day to do nothing but play in, how happy I should be!" said Rosie to her mother at breakfast time.

"Try it," said her mother. "Play as much as you like. Try it to-day."

How the children going to school envied Rosie, as she swung on the gate and watched them passing by. No hard, long, lesson for her. When they were gone, she ran into the garden, picked some gooseberries for a pudding, and took them into the kitchen.

"No, Rosie. That is work. Take them away."

Rosie looked serious. She got her doll and played with it, but soon tired; her shuttlecock, but did not care for it; her ball—it bounced into the kitchen window. Rosie peeped in after it. Mother was shelling peas.

"May I help you, mother?"

"No, Rosie, this is n't play."

Rosie strolled away, with slow, lagging footsteps, to the garden again. She leaned against the fence and watched the chickens. Soon she heard her mother setting the table for dinner, and longed to help. After dinner Rosie took her little bag of patchwork and stole away to the barn with it, for she could stand idleness no longer.

"Mother," she said, as she gave her a good-night kiss, "I understand now what the teacher meant when she said, 'He has hard work who has nothing to do.'"

1910 Lewis H. Snyder.

Lewis H., the young son of Mr. and Mrs. Edward M. Snyder, aged 12 years, died at his home on Summit street, Sunday morning at 5:30 o'clock, after an illness of about two weeks from membranous consumption of the brain. The funeral was held from the Methodist church on Tuesday afternoon at 2 o'clock, Rev. A. A. Walker officiating. Interment at Mellenville.

Many beautiful flowers were contributed by friends, conspicuous among the floral offerings being pieces from the Methodist Sunday school class of which deceased was a member, the Kings Heralds of which he was also a member, the K. O. T. M., Miss Weed's room of the public school, and others. Lewis was one of the bright converts of the revival meetings held in the Methodist church during the last winter, and was very earnest in the new life he was striving to lead.

Friends from out of town in attendance at the funeral were Mrs. Matilda Clum of Waterford; Mrs. Elizabeth Kimball and Floyd Friss, Lee, Mass.; Perry Brusie and Mrs. E. Rogers, Craryville; Charles Brusie, Maple Grove; Mr. and Mrs. Edward Nonomaker, Hudson.

Reading—By Walter Clemens, the following poem written by Mrs. H. A. Lockwood on the death of Louis Snyder, a member of the Sunday school:

There's a place in our ranks that is vacant to-day,

For one little boy has gone home,
To the glad happy land that is far, far away,

Where only the glorified come.

He would have been here, and stood in my place,

To tell the sweet story of old,
But the Shepherd knew best, and with loving embrace

He carried him safe to the fold.

His sufferings are over, and he is so glad

To be with that beautiful throng,
In garments of light, to-day he is clad,
And joining the children's day song.

Yes, Lewis our playmate is safe over there,

But we hear him still calling us on,
And he's singing to-day the song he loved here,

"Precious jewels, His loved and His own."





